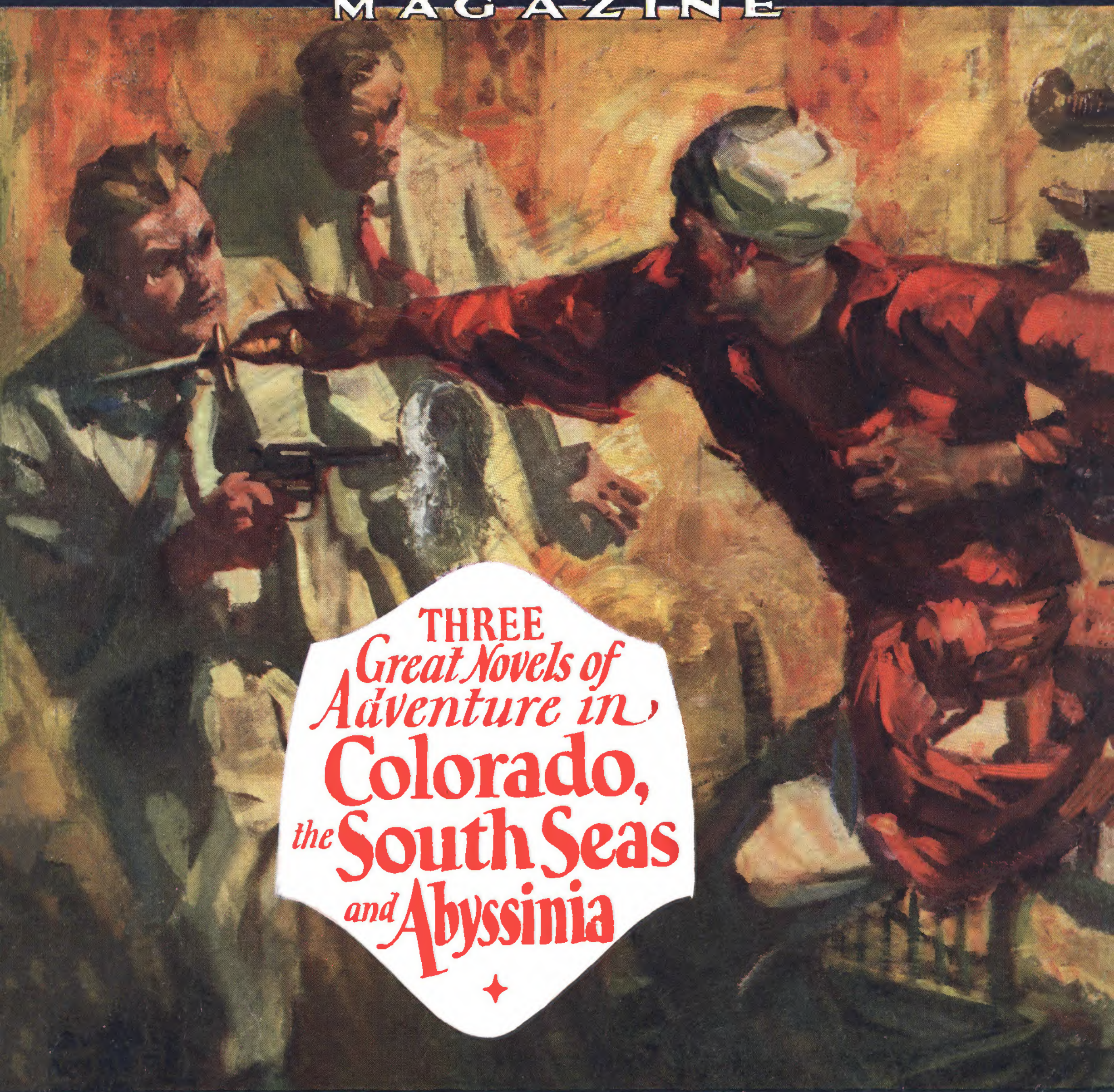
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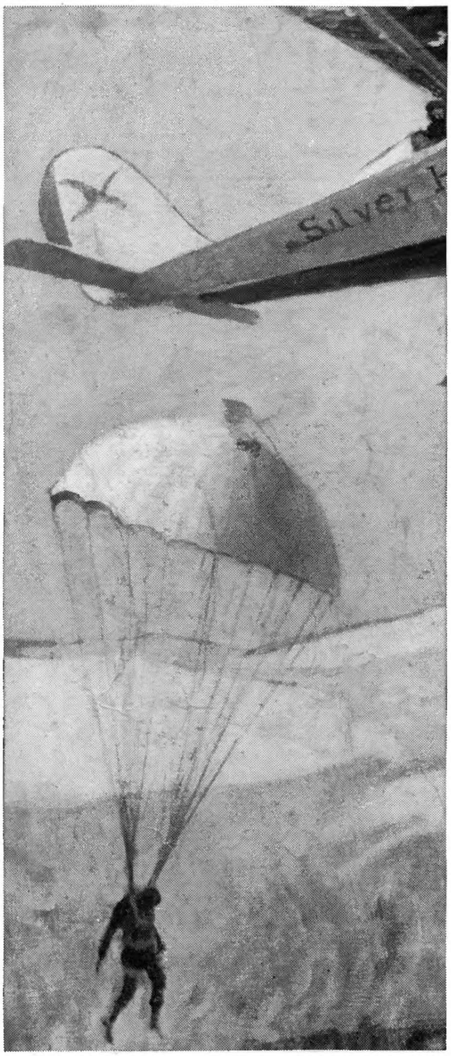
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MAGAZINE

AUGUST, 1928



Reg Dinsmore's cabin, where "Barren-Land Battle" was written.

REG DINSMORE

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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE
Vol. 47 AUGUST 1928 No. 4

The Virtues of Fiction

"EVERY fiction since Homer," observed Sir John Mackintosh, "has taught friendship, patriotism, generosity, contempt of death. These are the highest virtues; and the fictions which taught them were therefore of the highest .... utility."

In appraising a story or a novel, or a collection of them in the form of a magazine, it is interesting to consider them from this point of view. First of all, of course, the story or novel must kindle your interest and hold it till the last sentence. It must carry conviction—you must believe it, at least while you are reading. And furthermore, if it is to be enjoyable, you must like the more prominent characters—must take pleasure in their society. But beyond this,—beyond, that is, the essentials of a merely *successful* story,—by what standards are we to judge it?

We believe that most if not all of the stories printed in this magazine do teach friendship, patriotism, generosity, contempt of death. They are chosen, as a rule, with that thought in mind.

To particularize, consider Arthur H. Carhart's "The Forest Legion:" there's patriotism there, in the Forest Ranger's devoted fight to preserve the forest for the nation; there's fine friendship there too, and generosity; and—especially in the terrific struggle against fire so ably described in the next installment—contempt of death.

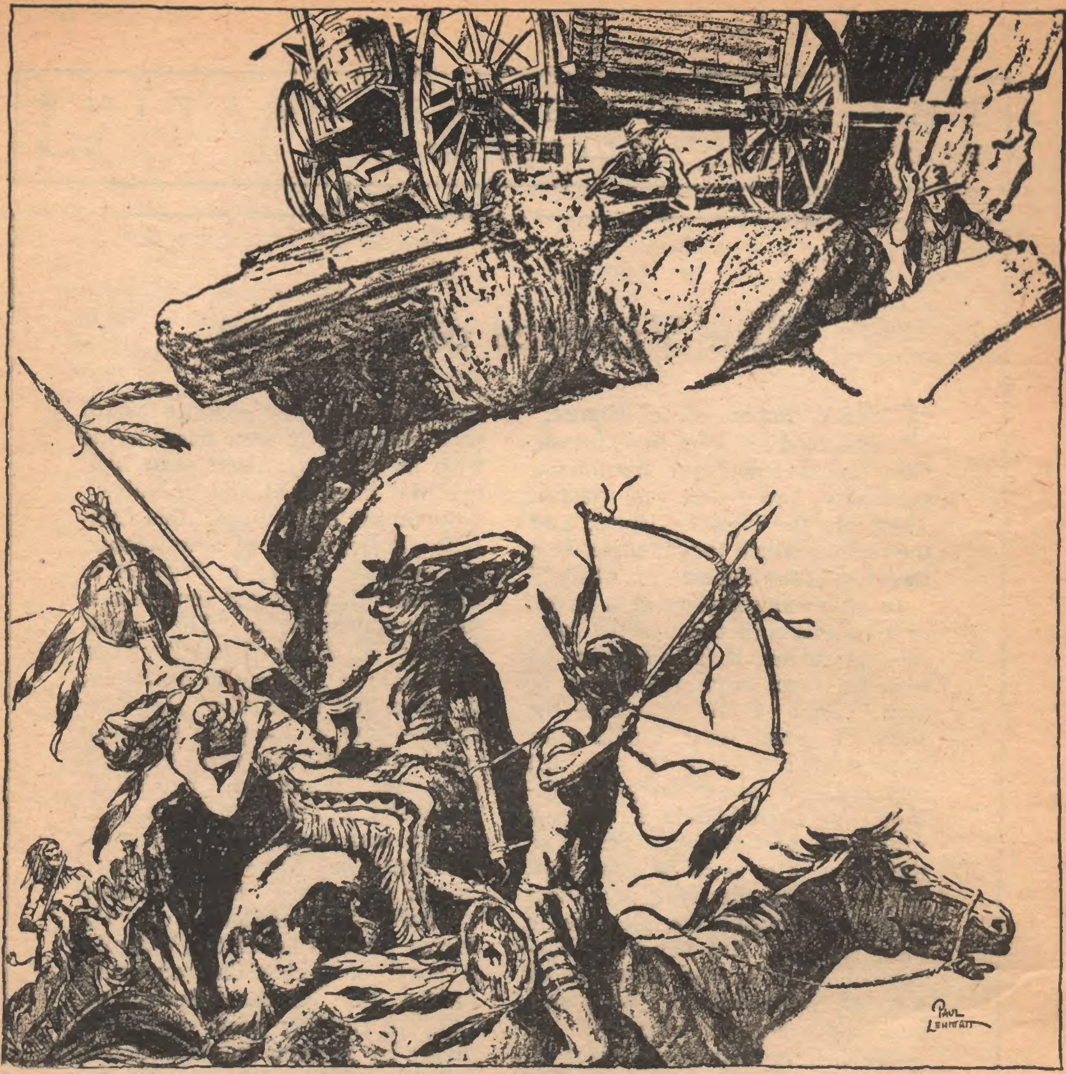
In Warren Hastings Miller's stirring drama of the Foreign Legion, likewise,—"The Hell's Angels Squad,"—you will find in that hard-boiled gang, in their conduct toward each other and in their fierce battle with their enemy, these same high qualities made real and desirable.

Again in "Lost Wings," that carefully charted story of a westbound transatlantic flight; in "Spears in the Sun," that intrepid venture into savage Abyssinia; in "The Hostile Island," H. Bedford-Jones' picturesque tale of mystery in Malaysia; in these and in most of the other stories—and in our prize stories of real experience, as well—you will encounter friendship, patriotism, generosity, contempt of death.

You may, moreover, confidently anticipate this same point of view in our next issue. Reg Dinsmore, a professional outdoor man who knows whereof he writes, will offer a novel of present-day adventure in the Far North. "Buccaneers, Ltd.," a thrilling novel of modern piracy by Stephen Hopkins Orcutt, will give you some real thrills; Roy Norton, Lemuel De Bra, Warren Hastings Miller, Clarence Herbert New, Dick Wick Hall, and many other writers of vivid and virile fiction will give you of their best. And five of your fellow-readers will tell for you the story of the most remarkable experience of their lives.

We have three tests in judging a story: does it pick up your interest at once and hold it to the end? Do you enjoy the story while you read it? Do you feel better when you have put it down? These tests, we believe, will produce for you in this next issue a fascinating magazine.

—The Editors.



Drawn by Paul Lehman

Men Who Won the West

Trader Topance

IN continual peril from hostile Indians and an equally hostile wilderness, Alexander Topance and his fellow-freighters performed a gallant and little recognized service. His adventures were numberless; his biography is a saga of pioneer daring.

In January of 1866, for example, after a bitter battle with the Sioux near Fort Union, he was struck by a severe blizzard:

"We had to corral our wagons and take our cattle down to an old Indian camp on the river, and the storm was so severe and so cold that there was fifteen days we dared not all go to bed at once. We had big army tents. We kept a fire in them, and some of the men had to keep fire outside between the tents.

"We were unable to save the cattle. We had to shoot them, as their horns would freeze and burst off from the pith; their necks would freeze, and their legs, so that they couldn't move at all, while others froze standing up. The buffalo began to drift in from the north during this storm and all that was left outside the timber froze to death.

"After we had killed all the cattle and horses, we had but two mules left, Molly and one other, which we had kept inside a tent and fed on buffalo meat and cottonwood bark."

After a month of this, Topance and another freighter, Mann, left their wagons and set out for Helena in two feet of snow to buy fresh animals. Returning with six hundred, they were repeatedly attacked by Indians and lost nearly all their animals, and two men. Later two of the men killed each other in a fight. And when Topance finally got back to his camp with one wounded mule and his life, he found the wagons all swept away by a flood. . . . . Ruined but indefatigable, he borrowed money and went to freighting again.

Lost Wings

By CULPEPER ZANDTT

This first of a remarkable group of stories "Mysteries of Today" sheds real light on the fate of the many missing westbound transatlantic aviators—and is itself one of the most engrossing stories we have ever printed.

Illustrated by William Molt

CROMERLEY HALL nestles under the shoulder of a hill on the westerly slopes of Dartmoor. A mile and a half from the Hall, on an open patch of the downs, is one of the flying-fields where aviators are trained—where the air-minded younger generation of that particular shire take off on trial flights to Le Bourget, to the south of France or even to the African coast. Lord Cromerley is a breeder of racing stock, a horticulturist off and on, and a Government man entrusted with confidential missions to other Governments. Viscount John, the heir, is on various boards in the city; Richard, the second son, is in the Army—Thomas in the diplomatic corps. Lady Marian, the pet of the family and a county toast, with a comfortable fortune of her own from a deceased aunt, is a duly licensed air-pilot and thinks in terms of ethereal altitudes.

They had been trying out a new Handley-Page recently built to her order, over on the flying-field—therefore the group of young people who came trailing along for tea were mostly in flying-togs, the single exception being Bob Warriner, the navy lieutenant whom Lady Marian had just fetched down from Croydon in her plane for the week-end.

Lieutenant Warriner's cruiser had been ordered to the Western Atlantic Squadron, and was leaving on Tuesday for New York. As Lord Cromerley was crossing immediately, with business in Washington, he had wangled an invite from the Admiralty to go over on Warriner's boat, which was in the thirty-knot class. It was generally understood that Lady Marian would marry the Lieutenant some day, when she got ready to settle down, and His Lordship—the whole family, in fact—thoroughly approved of the match, for Bob Warriner had money of his own, and ability as an oceanographer which insured rapid promotion.

IN the billiard-room, after dinner, they were talking of the hitherto unaccomplished western flight across the North Atlantic—all of the aviators being of the opinion that it was a straight gamble, with luck as the chief element. But Warriner disagreed with them.

"Luck merely enters into the proposition as far as whether the trip is unusually trying an' diffic'lt, or whether conditions are more favorable than one has any right to count upon. Any flyer who attempts that trip relying upon his luck to fetch him safely across is a fool who ought to be locked up as irresponsible! You'll recall that a number had made the attempt to cross in an easterly direction on a nonstop flight without accomplishing it. Alcock and Browne got across on the shortest possible hop, with a favoring gale behind them—but the others failed. Then the American Navy an' mail-service men tackled it in a serious way—refusin' to budge until they knew about what average conditions were going to be, and just what the navigation actually was. We rather thought of them as old women, over here, with all their study an' preparation for the single nonstop flight. Then—just to prove the value of that same preparation—they made it three straight, one after the other: Lindy—Byrd—Chamberlain.

"Well—the unsuccessful chaps had laughed at the necessity for all that preparation. They were aces, mind you—skilled aviators, who could go aloft an' put on a combat-show, any time. Knew their way about in the air—flew above fog when they struck it—altitude only limited by the rarefied air. But they knew no more about the Western Ocean flight-conditions than baby kittens—tackled them with the idea that it was mostly luck."

RANDALL WILLIAMS—a neighboring youth who had acted as mechanic on all of Lady Marian's flights—was inclined to agree with Warriner, for Williams was himself trained to exact science rather than the hit-or-miss idea—but Captain Bolling, R.F.C., who usually flew with her as co-pilot, took the usual flying-ace's view.

"You're looking at it from a navigator's standpoint, Leftenant—but a flyer's problem is something else again. Take the compass, for example. Have ye ever been aloft when the old bus struck a lot of bumps? Ever noticed what they do to a magnetic compass? Every time ye switch suddenly from an area of high pressure to a lower one, you're likely to get a few jolts that'll throw you out of your seat if the straps fail to hold—an' what they do to a compass is plenty! If you're lucky enough to strike no bumps in the whole flight, I'll grant ye the compass is worth considerin'—but I'd not trust it after you've been knocked about a bit. Well, then—what have ye to rely upon next—except your own knowledge of the game an' what ye fancy may be ahead of ye? Aye?"

"Oh—admit that the magnetic compass is a poor crutch, if you like. What's wrong with the earth-induction compass?"

"Over *water?* From all I've heard, the thing's not fairly out of the experimental stage, as yet—sun-compass as well. No! If ever I try the Western Ocean hop, I'll trust to what I know from hard-earned experience—that's what!"

"You mean that you'd not even study in advance the weather conditions for that particular month? Not know whether there's likely to be pack-ice and bergs under you part of the way—what the average current and air-drift are, for that time of the year?"

"Why should one bother with all that when he's not steamin' along the surface of the water, where he's likely to hit or be influenced by 'em? The flyer is way above all that, d'ye see—an' most of the hop is in the dark, you know. I'd look balmy, standin' out on one of the wings with a sextant, trying to shoot the sun at —say—two in the morning!"

"You speak as if you had some notion of trying that hop, Captain. Are you really considering it?"

"Prob'ly no more than every aviator is —we've all got the bug, more or less. Even Lady Marian talks of it."

Warriner was suddenly apprehensive—and turned to her with a sharp question.

"You wouldn't really try anything of that sort—would you, Marian?"

"Why—I fancy I might—at some psychological moment. Those three Americans made it like so many liners—on schedule time."

"Flyin' *east*—with a tail-wind! Not *west*—buckin' every mile of the way!"

"Oh, it's not always a head-wind, you know—nor all the way across, either. Of course, I don't know how old a woman I may be when I die—but sometime before then, I expect to make that hop. Everyone will be doing it, you know, sooner or later—when we've learned the game and what to look out for."

ON Tuesday the cruiser lay off Plymouth until His Lordship came out in a launch. Sunday morning, she steamed into New York harbor, and the Earl proceeded to Washington with Warriner, who had obtained a couple of weeks' leave. On the morning after they left Plymouth, Bolling and Lady Marian were discussing the extreme cruising-load of her new plane, down at the flying-field. Presently he suggested their putting such a load aboard and finding out whether they could get off the ground. Much to their surprise, she lifted into the air without apparent effort—and they added more weight when they came down. After some experimentation, they decided that she could easily carry gas enough for at least fifty hours in the air—in addition to three suitcases, radio code-set and several days' food-supply. They had practiced communicating with the ground in spark-code, upon several occasions, and were sufficiently expert to pick up thirty words a minute, if necessary. When they finally brought the plane down for the day, she said:

"I can't see why we shouldn't make it! Can you?"

"Not if we get any decent break at all! Either we land at Mitchell Field, some place north of there—or else we'll be where Nungesser an' Coli an' the rest of 'em are now—wherever that is. It's a gamble, of course—but I'd say a good two to one in our favor."

"Very good! We'll say nothing to anybody. Get a full load of gas aboard at diff'rent times, so they wont notice it. Take tinned stuff—vacuum bottles of hot coffee—cold water. Fancy we might as well take automatics, with a hundred rounds. Might be in a hole where that would be the easiest way out—might come down where the people didn't like us. Slip off tomorrow evening without mentioning any destination. What?"



"There's a small steamer, by Jove! Pinched between two floes which came together. There's open water beyond."

UPON the following afternoon the three went up—with the plane loaded up to fully the safe limit if not a trifle more. It took off in a clean, businesslike way and got up to about two thousand meters—but while to those on the ground it appeared to be flying perfectly, the trio in the inclosed cabin had the sensation of being on a waterlogged boat. They lifted her another five hundred meters. According to the altimeter, that seemed to be just about her ceiling—yet Lady Marian had sent that same plane up to five thousand meters three days before, with only a few hours' supply of gas.

"Not so good, Cap'n—not too good, you know!" commented Lady Marian—in the tight cabin conversation was not too difficult. "Of course we'll be going higher with her as the fuel-supply is used up, but we'll not do enough climbing to get over things until there's less weight. We've enough gas aboard for a good fifty-five hours—possibly more, but we shouldn't need more than forty hours at the outside. Why not dump a hundred gallons or more, and lighten her?"

"Aye—we'll do that, possibly. But, d'ye see—it's not necess'ry just yet. Wouldn't it be more advisable to run along as we are until we really need to go higher, an' then dump some of it? Eh? Might not have to until we'd used enough to make the old bus lighter anyhow."

"Right you are! What I was thinking of was a sudden flurry that wouldn't give us much time for the dumping. But—we'll wait."

After the plane had gone up and circled once over the moor, it headed due west on a course which would take it sixty miles south of Fastnet, Ireland, and hit the upper part of Newfoundland if there were no deviations. Within an hour, it was known in Tavistock that Lady Marian and her companions were heading straight out to sea with an unusually heavy fuel-supply. Within two hours it was known in London and Liverpool, merely as a surmise, that

an attempt at another Western Ocean hop might be tried out—but on the other side of the Atlantic, every afternoon paper in the Eastern States was coming out with a two- or three-column head over the statement that the well-known Lady Marian Cromerley, with Captain Sam Bolling and Mr. Randall Williams, had started on a westerly hop.

AT ten o'clock that evening, when the three had finished a very comfortable dinner and the plane had been in the air five hours, Williams started up the little generator and began sending out a commercial call on sixteen hundred meters. He supposed that his output on the antennæ strung along the upper wing might possibly amount to a thousand watts—which, at sea, ought to give him from five to seven hundred miles radius under favorable atmospheric conditions. Getting no immediate reply, he tuned up and down the merchant-marine band until he finally got a faint buzz of code-acknowledgment from a C. P. R. boat whose operator said they were approximately in 15 W. Lon. 50-27 N. Lat.—and that, according to their radio-compass, the plane must be something over a hundred miles due east of them. Fifteen minutes later, another steamer had relayed this first report to the big R. C. A. Station at Rocky Point, Long Island, and it was being heard all over the United States. When Williams gave his companions the steamer's position, they wanted to know about where that would be on the map. He showed them, on a small Mercator chart—but they said he must be way off.

"Why, Randall, this bus has been doing a hundred and thirty miles an hour every day we've been up! According to that operator, we aren't more than a hundred miles west of Ireland! Just figure up five hours and a half at a hundred and thirty miles, and see where it is on the chart!"

"That would bring us practically right over where he says *he* is—fifteen west longitude—two hundred and forty geographical miles west of Fastnet, Ireland. And his radio-compass would give the same strength of signal in every direction. But he says it's much stronger to the east of him, though weak enough at that—between a hundred and fifty and two hundred miles away. He's undoubtedly right—those chaps use their radio-compasses enough to know what they're talking about. The reason for it is that we're making no allowance for the strong west wind we're bucking into. If we were making a hundred and thirty—with a head-wind at sixty—we'd be actually doing only about seventy—probably less than that, because the load we're carrying, while adding to the momentum once we're moving, requires more of a shove to push it, and we've not increased our horsepower at all."

Bolling said he was making altogether too much allowance for wind, that what they were getting simply couldn't be any sixty-mile gale. Williams told him to open the side door of the cabin and see whether he cared about climbing out on the wings. When the Captain did open the door, he was inclined to revise his estimate somewhat, but wouldn't agree that the wind could be over forty miles or that they were doing less than a good steady ninety.

At five in the morning Lady Marian got another liner about twenty five degrees west of Greenwich. When the operator courteously sent his code at half-speed for her, she made out that he thought they were directly north of him about sixty miles. She thanked him, and he wished her good luck—said that boats on the North Atlantic were listening for her reports every few minutes, relaying to shore on both sides. He thought, from the strength of her signals, that anyone within five hundred miles would pick them up under average conditions—two hundred, if the static was bad.

They had hot coffee and something more to eat, about eight—then held a council of war.

"At this rate, we'll only be a little more than halfway across at the end of twenty-four hours—and the Americans made nearly three times the distance in thirty-six!"

"With strong tail-winds—which are equally strong head-winds goin' this way. At this rate, we'll make Nova Scotia easy enough, even if we have to come down there for another half-load of gas to make Mitchell Field. What do you think, Randall?"

"Well—I still fancy that St. Johns, Newfoundland, is a fairly good gamble on our last few gallons. We may count on that, I think, if the luck isn't too much against us."

"St. John's! Why, man, you're dotty! That's more than five hundred miles east of Halifax—an' I was figurin' we'd still



Williams crept out upon the wings with a hatchet and knocked off a lot of the ice.

have a good many gallons when we come down there!"

"Yes—but you're not figuring upon some other things. I've been getting what glimpses I could, below, when the sun came out once or twice. We had ice-cakes under us for half an hour. We've had more than half a dozen bergs. We're considerably north of the steamer-tracks—which of course shortens our distance some, but isn't so good on weather—I can't quite figure out how we happen to be there. And if you ask *me*, I'd say the air feels dev'lish like snow! Well—snow, d'ye see, isn't so good for us—not good at all, in fact. I'd say head more to the south—at once—though I doubt if that'll rid us of the snow."

"If it wont, what's the use? You say the distance is shorter, farther north—seems to me that'd be better."

"Yes—it's shorter—to Labrador. But, d'ye see—I'm not strong for Labrador. It's land, of course, but dev'lish cold an' barren!"

"What the deuce!" The plane began to buck—and bump as violently as if it were hitting pinnacles on a berg. "Low pressure, by Jove! Fancy you're right about the snow, old chap. I say! Look at the compass—that last bump gave it the staggers! How the deuce can we be sure of south when the dev'lish thing wont keep still long enough! Oh, well—long's the wind's dead ahead, we know we're goin' generally west, an' that's where we want to go, aint it?"

"Wind's likely to shift any old way in a storm, if it has a cyclonic twist. We'll have to do the best we can with that compass—just figure it's sick an' irresponsible, but meanin' well all the same. Prob'ly it's a darned sight nearer right than the wind-direction, if we really know what that is. I'd not swear to it myself!"

BLINDING flurries of snow and sleet enveloped them—suddenly. In fifteen or twenty minutes the plane seemed to move a trifle sluggishly. Not really sure he'd get back, Williams crept out upon the wings with a hatchet and knocked off quite a lot of the ice which had formed along the forward edges. When the numbness in his hands warned him that he must give it up or not get back, he managed to reach the door and pound upon it until the Captain hauled him in. Lady Marian had been trying to gain altitude and get above the snow. Whether she actually did this or whether they ran into a small area of clearer, lighter air, they never knew. For the next few hours they got occasional sky and moonlight. Once, they sighted, far south of them, what appeared to be a big liner with two funnels, and tried to call her—but it was over an hour before Williams could get his transmitting-set to work, and by that time they couldn't succeed in getting any acknowledgment. Presently it occurred to Williams that some of the more powerful receiving-sets on the liners might pick up his faint signals when his own set was too weak to get theirs. So he began sending out on different wave-lengths the same message:

> Cromerley plane—ten o'clock Friday night—don't know position—have just sighted large steamer with two small funnels—apparently thirty miles south.

This message he repeated twenty times.

Two hours afterward a W.S.W. gale struck them—edging the plane considerably farther north than they supposed they were going. Then came more snow—blinding, freezing, soft enough to form more ice on the propeller-blades and wings. At one time, with the compass jumping so violently that it was useless, they ran due north without knowing it—changing back to W. by S. by a pure fluke when the wind seemed to be almost on their tail—and probably was, for a few minutes.

Between seven and eight o'clock, eastern standard time, an amateur in one of the smaller cities of Maine picked up the last half of that ten o'clock message from mid-ocean. Being one of the really scientific bugs with a fine equipment of his own build, he kept doggedly tuning up and down the marine bands until he caught the full message on another wave—faintly, but clear enough to be sure of it with what he had picked up before. He immediately called up the leading newspaper of his town, and gave the managing-editor what he had heard. As he had given the paper and some of the large radio-stations valuable information before, the editor wired the message down to Boston—where it was put on the air as unconfirmed news and broadcasted all over the country. It was the last message received from the Cromerley plane—considered by nine-tenths of the radio-audience a hoax or pure imagination, simply because no liner had reported receiving anything of the sort, when it had been near enough to be sighted by the plane and had an equipment which enabled its operators to talk with both sides of the Atlantic at once.

IN Washington, Lord Cromerley and Lieutenant Warriner sat up all night in a friend's house, listening to half-hourly radio reports—and they were but two out of millions. Reporters sat around the editorial-rooms of all the leading papers in the country—waiting for more news to break. In the various stations, broadcasters stood their "mikes" and telephones on the same desk—sending out for occasional sandwiches and coffee through the night. In city homes and isolated farmhouses, people went to bed with their sets switched on—and dozed between the half-hourly announcements.

This was practically what had happened during every one of the transatlantic flights. In this particular case, however, the interest was emphasized by the fact that the person responsible for the flight—the chief figure in it—was a handsome, well-known, daredevil girl who was also a skillful aviator with a number of successful flights to her credit. All Saturday there were conflicting rumors. Two men and a woman had been seen on an island off Nova Scotia—a woman had been seen from one of the search-planes clinging to wreckage, off Newfoundland—three moving objects had been seen on an ice-floe, up Labrador way—an old *habitant* of the Gaspé region had distinctly heard the drone of a plane over his house and a crashing of timber as it came down in the woods beyond him. But—they all checked up to—nothing; imagination or some natural occurrence—accounted for in a normal way.

By Sunday, Lord Cromerley and Warriner were convinced that the plane had never gotten as far as Newfoundland. Whether there could be any chance at all for life, anywhere short of that, they didn't know. It seemed impossible. The Government was doing, as they supposed, everything that could be done—sending out planes and patrol-boats to search as long as there seemed to be any hope at all.

On Monday afternoon one of the American naval officers whom Warriner knew and liked telephoned from New York to ask if he and His Lordship would be willing to come up by next train and meet a friend of the Captain's who thought he might be able to give them some valuable information concerning the plane. Warriner immediately wanted to know why the friend hadn't already given this information to the press or the Government.

"Because it is actually more or less theoretic—though based upon scientific information which he has received. The probabilities are that neither one would pay any serious attention to him—or go to any expense in testing out his theories. . . . . Wait a minute, now! . . . . Just listen until I'm through! I happen personally to know of five mysteries which both the press and the police gave up as impossible to solve. My friend did solve them—saving lives, property and reputations. I think in a case of this sort he would make no charge for his services, though he's not in business for his health any more than the rest of us. When it comes to keen intuition, analytical scientific reasoning, cold, precise deduction, he'll have you sitting up



From the men in that small space there came loud exclamations: "Come h'inside, blarst ye—an' shut the bloody door!"

and paying close attention before he's been talking five minutes. I'm not guaranteeing that he'll help you—perhaps he wont go so far as saying that himself, but I consider it better than a fifty-fifty proposition that he'll find Lady Marian and her companions if they're still alive! He thinks it quite possible that they may be. Will you two come to New York—at once?"

"I'll come—and I fancy Lord Cromerley will also. The proposition sounds rather batty, but deuce take it all, we're neglectin' nothing which may offer a chance of finding 'em, you know! Aye—we'll come!"

WHEN Captain Sumner met their train at the Pennsylvania Station, he took them in a taxi down to the Wall Street district—and escorted them up in the all-night elevator of a thirty-story office building as far as the twenty-fifth floor, where they went into a large studio with spacious windows which faced down the Bay. Here they found a tall, athletic man with powerful features, surrounded by paintings, armor, rare and beautiful objects used as properties in his professional work. The man didn't look like an artist—his rooms didn't look like the habitat of anything else. Upon the wall opposite the big expanse of windows, under a length of mercury-vapor light, the two halves of the big Admiralty chart of the North Atlantic, with smaller U. S. pilot charts of the current year, were fastened by thumb-tacks.

As Sumner introduced them, Normanton said:

"I recognize Lord Cromerley from his pictures, and I've seen Lieutenant Warriner—but can't remember where. Help yourselves to cigars and wine, gentlemen—pick out some easy chairs—I may be somewhat long-winded before I get through. First—I want to ask some questions. From what little I could pick out of the newspapers, I infer that Randall Williams has the more scientific mind of the three. That right? And that he would most likely object to making a start upon this sort of adventure without thorough preparation—but was enough of a sport to trail along if the other two wouldn't listen to him. Right?"

"Aye. Fancy Randall's much that sort of chap."

"Good! You see, I'm banking upon

that scientific thoroughness of his when they finally got up against it. Also I infer that Lady Marian is a first-class pilot under average European flying conditions—cool, resourceful as far as the handling of a plane is concerned—but impulsive enough to start off on some risky proposition, depending upon her skill alone to pull her through. And that Captain Bolling, while an expert in combat and stunt-flying, has had no experience in long-distance hops, particularly over water. Right?"

"Er—quite so, Mr. Normanton. I fancy you'll have hit them off exactly as they are—three diff'rent temperam'nts."

"Then, as a basis upon which we may safely start, I'm fairly certain that they took off on the spur of the moment with but a few hours of preparation. That there was little or no studying of weather conditions—telegraphing the Admiralty and the U. S. Hydrographic Department for the latest reports—wind, currents, ice, all the things a shipmaster would like to know, on the surface of the water. They just went up and headed west across the North Atlantic, expecting to see some evidence of Newfoundland or Nova Scotia by the next afternoon at the latest—probably expecting the plane to make within twenty miles of its usual average speed. All right! Now let's see what began to happen."

"But—how the deuce can you possibly know *that*, Mr. Normanton?"

"I'll show you. And if you think I'm surmising beyond the facts, don't hesitate about saying so. They took off from Dartmoor Thursday afternoon—supposing their plane was doing about a hundred and thirty, or a hundred and fifteen at the worst. It had done better than a hundred and fifty with a light load—so they figured the average in their Continental flying at a hundred and twenty-five or thirty. At ten o'clock that evening Randall Williams succeeded in getting the *Duchess of Bedford*—whose operator then fixed the plane's position as approximately eighty or ninety miles west of Fastnet, which must have been at least a hundred and fifty miles less than they had been figuring, and farther north than they thought they were steering. Of course we'll never know until they tell us just what the discussion was at that point—but I'm banking on its having been something of that sort. Am I within the probabilities so far, Lieutenant?"

"Entirely so, I fancy! As a navigator, I'd say the same thing."

"All right. Next—we know that they didn't have much trouble during the night, except from failing properly to allow for compass-variation—deviation, and wind-drift. The *Duchess* reported a sixty-five-mile wind in that vicinity. The charts show a magnetic variation of twenty-two to twenty-four degrees west, along the course they followed that night—and considering the basis on which we are visualizing them, Williams is the only one who might have tried to figure that. Presumably, having no pilot chart for that month with them, he wouldn't know what the variation was at that point. Being an engineer instead of a navigator, he wouldn't be conversant with many details of that sort, though I'm gambling upon his knowledge of some. At five o'clock in the morning Lady Marian succeeded in getting the *Helig Olav*, which takes a much more northerly course than the Liverpool liners. She wasn't as fast in receiving code as Williams, so the operator sent at half-speed to insure her getting it. He placed the plane as sixty to eighty miles north of him, and on dead-reckoning from the previous noon position, he was twenty-five degrees west of Greenwich. This again must have been a disappointment to them—because nine-tenths of the aviators would have figured that they should have made by that time at least three hundred miles farther west—also, they should have been to the south of the *Helig Olav's* course instead of to the north of it."

WARRINER had risen from his chair to follow, on the small pilot chart of the North Atlantic, the points Normanton made.

"I fancy you're absolutely right, old chap—so far, at least! The wind-drift—at sixty-five miles, from the sou'-east—would have been shovin' 'em farther north, little by little—an' would have cut their speed to just about half, keepin' them back much farther east than they supposed—using up their gas in buckin' the gale."

"Precisely. Now we come to what they struck during the day. The pilot chart for the previous month shows average areas of low-pressure right about where they were—which means a strong probability of snow and sleet-squalls at almost any time that month. A southwest wind would keep the snow a bit soft, but their motion in a five- or six-thousand-foot altitude would make wings and propeller-blades cold

enough to freeze anything wet that struck them. The 'wind-roses' for that locality show that, while the prevailing wind was west and southwest, it blew all around the compass for some hours out of each hundred. The red storm-axis lines show that there was a heavy storm there during the previous month which started north of their position and circled around it until it disappeared in the northeast. The *Helig Olav* reported catching one hell of a snow-squall, wet and sleety, a few hours after they talked with the plane—continuing pretty well through the day, and boxing the compass. That amateur up in Maine reported at seven-forty-five, Eastern standard time, a message sent from the plane about ten by their clock, which, I imagine, Williams would have set an hour or two later than Greenwich, that evening. (He'd know enough to do that.) That message, to-night, is set down as a hoax upon the part of some irresponsible amateur with an abortive sense of humor. The Maine radio-bug is credited with receiving it in perfect good faith because he has an excellent reputation for serious and valuable information, invariably found correct when it could be checked up. But it's generally discounted as a hoax upon him by some Nova Scotia amateur with a weak set—because no report has come from any steamer near that area as picking up any such message."

"It said they had sighted, by moonlight, a large liner about thirty miles south of them. Sounds hardly possible, you know!"

"Yes—they could have done that if conditions were exactly right. Presumably they were still at least three thousand feet up. A liner south of them would have been exactly in the wake of the moon at that time on the horizon, so that the reflected light would silhouette her. With ten-power night-glasses and clear air, they could have made her out, easily, at that altitude. They mention two small funnels. We know they had been getting off their course, far to the north of the Liverpool steamer-tracks and even north of those followed by the Scandinavian boats. We know about the average speed they really had been making. According to that, I figured their position at that time —on the large chart—as being approximately thirty-five degrees west and fifty-three north. . . . . Now get this! At ten o'clock last Friday evening the *Frederik VIII* was—on dead-reckoning from her noon position—in fifty-two degrees and thirty minutes north, and exactly thirty-five degrees west of Greenwich—having detoured north of her regular course to avoid a big berg. Can't get much closer checking up than that, can you?"

"BUT—but—why the devil didn't she get that message?" queried Warriner.

"There may be a dozen explanations for that. Williams may have sent out the message on different wave-lengths at some later hour, but given that as the time when he sighted the boat in order to have somebody check up on it. The *Frederik VIII* has two good-sized funnels, but they are narrower than the big English and French liners—would give the impression of being rather small, in a silhouette, thirty miles away. She has a three-deck superstructure, which would give her the appearance of a big liner. Aside from all that, she was the only boat within four hundred miles of that position at that hour, on that particular night. I had interest enough in the case to call up her master by radio and talk with him in code until I got these facts. Neither the press nor the Government will admit that any later word has been received from the plane since Lady Marian's talk with the *Helig Olav* that morning. But we absolutely know the ten P. M. message was a bona-fide one—know that within an hour of that time the worst snow and sleet storm on the North Atlantic, last week, came roaring down upon both the plane and the *Frederik VIII*—lasting over most of the western area until Sunday morning. Know that the plane was then running into a fog-area extending three hundred miles, northeast to southwest, and a hundred and fifty miles across. Know that when last heard of, with her fuel-supply half exhausted, she was actually a good eight or nine hundred miles east of where all the newspapers are placing her, and where even the Government aviators suppose she is—well east of the lower tip of Greenland instead of nearly or quite over to the Labrador coast-line.

"The point which has misled them entirely is their failure to take that Friday night message seriously and find out what liner might have been in that approximate position at the time. I've no doubt that officials of the line, and probably a few others as well, have asked the *Frederik's* operator if he got any such message—or that he told them, as he did me, that he

was on duty all night and got nothing of the sort. Well—they've let it go at that! Nobody seems to have figured that the subsequent storm, full of atmospheric disturbance, might have prevented the *Frederik's* getting it. They were doubtless busy with a lot of other messages in that storm, pretty much all night. Nobody has made half enough allowance for what such a storm would do to the plane and her compass. She certainly had no earth-induction compass—the ice on her wings added to the weight, lowering her ceiling—using up more fuel for the carrying of it. In fact, I don't believe even the Navy men have bothered to look up anything that was happening *east* of Greenland, that night—they were so darned sure the boat must have gotten farther west."

"Then—you think they must have gone down and under, somewhere in that fog area, southeast of Greenland?"

"I think they found themselves being forced down, there, and kept a lookout for something which might float them. The *Helig Olav* reported several floes a mile long, and occasional bergs, right along under where the plane must have been heavy with ice—and they were very soon farther north after talking with her. They could land on ice-floes easy enough—probably without much damage to the plane. They must have had at least three or four days' supply of food. People at the flying-field said all three had automatics—so they might easily shoot something to eat. Water is merely a question of melting snow—or eating it. But—there is another possibility which nobody seems to have considered. Of course it's not too good—I don't say that. But it's at least possible. Come over and look at these pilot charts—all of you! Know what this little red blob is?"—touching a spot on the chart with his pencil.

WARRINER grinned—then looked thoughtful.

"Hmph! By Jove! I fancy I can see what you're gettin' at, old chap, still—eh? That'll be a derelict, of course—way down in the Gulf Stream. Here's another, south of Newfoundland—floatin' bottom up."

"Yes—and if you look at this chart for the following month, you'll see that both have disappeared. As soon as possible after a derelict has been reported, Your Lordship, one of the Navy patrol-boats goes out to where it was last seen, follows the current-drift until she finds and sinks it, as a danger to navigation. Every little while, however, the patrol-boat fails to locate the derelict, or the floating wreckage reported—the supposition being either that it afterward sank, or that the position reported was erroneous. In the latter case it may be reported elsewhere by some other boat or may drift into the Sargasso Sea or some other No Man's Land where it wouldn't be located for years. In November the schooner *Aimée Saunders* was reported as a derelict two hundred miles off Cape Farewell on a line with Indian Harbor, Labrador. Two patrol-boats failed to find her.

"Previous to that—in August or September, I think—a two-thousand-ton steamer was loaded with steel and equipment for a big radio-station on the east coast of Greenland—English and Danish shareholders. There was a Greenland Eskimo as scullion in the galley, with a colored cook—both superstitious. Somehow got it into their heads that the radio was a hoodoo. Poisoned the master—both mates and both engineers. Suspicion against them, but no doctor aboard and no direct proof. Radio men were not navigators. Crew put them in one boat—took others for themselves—abandoned the steamer somewhere southeast of Cape Farewell—compelled radio men to follow them until they lost sight of her. Boats got separated next night—crew never heard from—may have drowned, may have gotten ashore and scattered. Radio men in open boat until food and water were gone. When picked up, only one was alive and he was raving crazy—in hospital nearly four months before he recovered sufficiently to give any coherent account of what had happened. By that time the steamer had been posted as missing—has never been seen since then, although it was searched for in January.

"You will notice that the Labrador current is a pretty strong one, flowing southeast and filling a good two-thirds of Davis Strait. Also that the Greenland Current is confined pretty close inshore—flowing down the east side, around Cape Farewell, and up the west side in Davis Strait. Seven hundred miles southeast of Cape Farewell you get tangent-current running up toward Greenland from the Gulf Stream, but not very strong. These three different currents form a dead space of little or no current just about where that fog-area is that the plane was flying into



When they waved and shouted, the pilot, recognizing them, pointed to the edge of the ice-floe, and banked his plane.

when last heard from. A derelict borne along on the edge of either current is almost certain to fetch up in that center of dead-water which is filled occasionally with drift-ice and floes seven or eight months of the year—possibly more or less open water at other times. That derelict schooner and the abandoned radio-steamer are probably somewhere in that dead-water—may stay there indefinitely—certainly had quite a supply of canned food aboard. Nobody goes there—it's out of any steamer-track; they may be there for years if they don't drift off into one of the currents. Even if they did, they'd be edged back toward the dead-water. And it's entirely possible that there may be other derelicts somewhere in that area. If they didn't go under when they came down, it's barely possible that one or two of the other missing aviators may be there today—though I think there's much less chance for it than with Lady Marian and her companions."

LORD CROMERLEY was eager, but still doubtful. It was difficult for him to pin his faith on pure theory. "You really think that chance is good enough to warrant our going up there with a steamer?" he asked.

"If I didn't think that, I shouldn't have bothered you with the communication!"

"What would you suggest in the way of a rescuing craft?"

"One of the St. Lawrence ice-breaking coasters, if you can get her—and you might at this time in the Provinces because navigation wont open up for another couple of months at least. Those boats have a curved stem and are strongly reinforced, for'ard, with extra collision-bulkheads—run right up on the ice and crack it with their weight. I'd also take a couple of good hydroplanes—two-seaters, carrying three at a pinch."

"Could we induce you to go with us, Mr. Normanton?"

"Well—I haven't any use at all for a spot as cold as that, but I'm exceedingly interested in finding out whether my study and deductions are really any good, or whether I've overlooked something which made the Navy men discard the possibility without much consideration. However—I'm willing to put it up to Warriner, here. Do you think I may possibly be way out, Lieutenant?"

"On the contr'ry, old chap! I'm by way of bein' a bit of oceanographer, myself—qualified in that, d'ye see; an' I can't discover a single point where your reasonin'

is at fault. Your whole contention is that possibly three times out of four in this western flight, no plane will cover anything like the distance it's supposed to cover in a given time—that unless a lot of allowance is made for windage an' magnetic deviation—using an earth-induction compass—the boat must be forced way north of her course, into bad weather which ice an' load will prevent her climbin' over—an' that, if this occurs, she's bound to come down approximately in that dead-spot of fog an' no current. On the other hand, with your figurin' an' the experience those on the plane must have had, it shouldn't be so vastly diffic'lt to lay a course, with the proper instrum'nts an' preparation, so that much of this danger would be eliminated. Eh?"

"Oh, it's going to be done before so very long—and we'll learn how to do it safely, forty-nine times out of fifty."

WE now return to the plane on Friday night, after the last message had been sent. Apparently, the motors were running smoothly—but if they hadn't been, there was no chance for examining them in that sleet storm. Williams' experience in trying to chop away the ice had convinced him that another fifteen minutes outside of the cabin, before daylight, would be his last. They knew there was more ice on the wings and propeller-blades by the feel of the bus, counteracting the gain in lightness from using up so many gallons of gas, but the plane was still able to fly at a pretty good clip.

As the seriousness of their situation increased, Lady Marian became cooler—concentrating upon the job in hand with all the strength of her unusually clear mind. She had taken over the controls herself, and was studying the jerky movements of the compass, trying to hit upon the mean center between the oscillations of the needle. By swinging the plane up very slightly and steadying it on its course, the needle would reduce its oscillations to narrow limits. Her allowances for magnetic variation had been made only in dense fog, as she could see the terrain at other times and paid no attention to the compass—but she had heard somewhere that the North Atlantic variation was several points west of north—so it seemed, working it out in her head, that if she steered about one hundred degrees west of north, she would be actually going ninety degrees west of it—or due west on the vernier. (This was still seventeen degrees short of the proper allowance—but she wouldn't have believed that.) Once she had it settled in her mind, right or wrong, she kept nursing plane and compass to synchronize in their movements until she maintained a more or less steady course at three thousand feet above the water, if the altimeter was functioning properly—and it seemed to be.

Bolling and Randall Williams were lounging on the benches at the side of the cabin behind her—smoking their pipes with careless confidence that the gale which penetrated various crevices hadn't left enough gas-vapor inside to ignite. There had been a three-day supply of hot coffee in the vacuum bottles—six bottles for each of them; and they sipped a little now to hearten them up. The two had exchanged a glance or two in silence—a faintly grinning one, which said: *"Last ride, old chap! Here's my best to you!"* Lady Marian wasn't admitting anything of the sort, as yet, though she thought their chances were none too good.

Hour after hour through the night, she sat there and drove the plane forward with every ounce of push there was in the roaring motors. Shortly after daybreak the altimeter showed less than a thousand feet—she couldn't force the bus any higher—it simply refused to climb. Then, for a while, the snow let up. The sky was mottled lead all around except a strip down along the eastern horizon, through which a blazing red sun shot a heartening flood of light across the water—light which touched with pink a white and sparkling expanse below them. They were coasting along just inside the edge of it—with dark, bottle-green water beyond, clear to the horizon.

"Randall! Figure how much gas there is left—quickly!"

It took him about ten minutes to do this.

"Sixteen hours' supply—at the rate we've been using it. How did you happen to drop down so far?"

"Can't get the bus fifty feet higher—she must be fairly loaded with ice! Fancy she'll not stay up another two hours unless we can get most of it off, and we'd freeze trying to do it. No use, old chaps! We've something here to land on—possibly I can pick out a place where it'll not damage the plane, and we may get her up again after an overhaul! I say! What's that black thing over there—sticking out of the ice? Put your glasses on it!"

"Small steamer, by Jove! Seems to have been pinched between two floes which came together an' piled up a ridge along where they joined. There's open water beyond the other floe—the two of them about three miles each way, I'd say. Big cakes of drift-ice in every direction."

"May be a lot of things on her we can use! Good shelter in this weather, at all events. The floe this side appears to be flat snow on top. I'll take the bus down on that!"

THREE times she circled about and "dragged" the floe—examining its surface from fifty feet above; then skimmed lightly down—closer—closer—until she made a perfect landing without injury to the plane, as far as they could see, when they climbed out. But the temperature was considerably below zero, penetrating even their fleece-lined flying-suits and helmets. The hike for the imprisoned steamer seemed nearer five miles than the one it actually was, as they had to climb over a good deal of rough ice where the floe had "bunched" under pressure—but they finally reached her side—then looked at each other in silent amazement. A thin spiral of smoke was curling up from a pipe over the galley, forward!

Pulling an automatic from the long outside pocket in her flying-trousers, Lady Marian examined it to see if it was in working order—then grasped a rope which hung over the side and "walked" herself up to the rail—Williams and the Captain following. After glancing about the deck, she opened the door leading into the cabin-gangway aft, and they went into the small mess-saloon—silently closing the door after them. Searching this and the half-dozen staterooms around it, they found no evidence that it had been occupied at all. The place was freezing cold—being heated by radiators only when there was steam under the boilers, so that whoever were aboard had found it a simpler problem to bunk in the galley where they could keep warm by the stove. After a few minutes there seemed nothing else to do but find out just what they were up against, so they quietly went forward to the galley—then silently opened the door.

SIX men were in the small space—three in bunks—three on stools near the fire, playing some game with a greasy pack of cards. On the wash-bench which served as a table when meals were being prepared, was a mass of dirty dishes with scraps of food adhering to them—on the range, a caldron of soup and a big pot of coffee. A tall negro was evidently the cook—an Eskimo, in his parka, might have been a visitor or one of the party. The other four were average fo'c'stle seamen—a Dane, a Cockney, an Irishman, a Singapore beachcomber—all except the Eskimo speaking what passed for English.

There were loud exclamations.

"H' I s'y! . . . . Come h'inside, blarst ye—an' shut th' bloody door. Oo d'ye farncy likes ter freeze h'in weather like this!"

The three stepped in and closed the door.

"Been here long—you chaps?"

"An' wot'll that be to *you*—felley-me-lad?"

"Not a thing, buddy—not a single bloomin' thing, if you like this place an' the scenery here! Lovely climate! We just happened along, an' we're leavin' presently—in a few days. But while we stay, we'd like to point out a few things about this hotel which aren't according to Lloyd's. There's no hot water for our bawths, you know—an' no heat in the saloon. That'll have to be looked after a bit—while we stay. In fact, you'll find the fo'c'stle more comfortable than this after we've put on the steam."

"An' 'ow th' bloody 'ell will ye be doin' that, now?"

"Why—there's doubtless plenty of coal aboard. Three of you are coming below with me to get fire under the boilers. After it's once good an' red, it'll only take a sprinklin' of coal on top, three or four times a day, to keep all the steam we'll need for heat and lights. Electrics are a dev'lish sight better than the paraffin lanterns you've got here. Any objections to havin' everybody comfortable while we stay?"

IN amazed speculation the men looked at each other. Knowing nothing of the way the piping system of the boat was arranged, how the dynamos were run, or in fact anything which went on below except the mere shoveling of coal into the furnaces, it hadn't occurred to them as possible to get the steamer into a more habitable condition for the climate. As the idea penetrated, they were strong for it. They were naturally suspicious of these three strangers who had dropped from nowhere—

but they seemed to know nothing about the steamer or her crew. All of the engine and stokehold men had been either poisoned or killed, afterward, in the boats before they sighted the ice-floes. They had been living on her for five months, eating a good many fish and seals which they had managed to catch.

Three of them went below with Captain Bolling, but he took no chances with them. He directed, crisply but pleasantly, what they were to do, and they carried out his orders—naturally supposing that he was a shipmaster, and obeying automatically. In four hours steam was hissing pleasantly through the pipes, the fo'c'stle was a more comfortable place for the six men, and discipline, more or less elastic, had been established. Williams and Lady Marian had discovered a small electric stove in the saloon-pantry, together with plated coffee- and teapots—dishes, frying-pans, enough utensils to get up a very decent hot meal if the raw materials were available.

So Bolling arranged watches and a working arrangement which at first seemed to be satisfactory all round. The men were to have galley and fo'c'stle to themselves—go below and see to the furnaces at certain hours. Williams kept the dynamo running—overhauled engines and steam-pipes. The supposed master and mates occupied the saloon and managed their own cooking, finding plenty of tinned food in the lazaret.

This worked perfectly for a week—the men being ordered to let the plane alone when they saw it. Then Bolling made a suggestion which again aroused their suspicions and turned the situation into a more dangerous one. He said the floes would probably separate in a couple of months, liberating the steamer—that he would take them, in it, to St. Johns or Halifax if they would agree to work the boat at sea as they had been doing. Or if they preferred waiting there until some other boat turned up, they three would take off again in their plane. Either way, they feared they would be turned over to the authorities for murder—if Bolling left in the plane, he was sure to send some Government boat up to arrest them. And then—they discovered for the first time that Lady Marian was a girl.

BACK in the saloon, Bolling said:

"That settles it! They're six to three! They'll be throwin' dice for her in the fo'c'stle, tonight! I don't believe they've got any firearms, but they may find some—we must search the engineers' rooms and these other cabins at once. We'll have to stand watch-and-watch all the time now—can't let up for a second! I don't know what that lot have been up to—but it was bad enough for them to take no chances on the law. . . . . I say! What the devil was *that?* Sounded like an airplane motor! There she goes again! For the Lord's sake, come on deck!"

A SEA-PLANE was circling over the steamer. When they waved and shouted, the pilot leaned over the edge of his cockpit and focused a pair of glasses on them. Recognizing their flying-togs, he waved his hand—pointed to the edge of the ice-floe—and banked his plane.

Running, scrambling over the rough ice until they were cut in several places, they got to the edge of the water fifteen minutes after the plane had swooped gracefully down upon the surface and taxied along to where the pilot could shout—through a small megaphone:

"Lord Cromerley and Lieutenant Warriner on steamer—ten miles east—will go up again and notify them at once! They should be here—take you off in launch—inside two hours! Better stick where you are, so we'll not miss you!"

When the launch arrived, Bolling offered to take the crew off—but they only became abusive:

"Nothing doin', Percy! We're a-st'yin' right 'ere—h'at 'ome—curse ye!"

At nine that evening, intercolonial time, the radio-station at Cape Race received a message which, half an hour later, came through the radio-sets in ten million homes:

> Lady Marian Cromerley and companions found on ice-floes S. E. Cape Farewell—alive and well. Rescue-steamer proceeding New York.

Normanton refused to accept a cent for his services, but made a suggestion which was promptly followed out. A certain radio-amateur in one of the Maine towns received with his mail, next day, a bank-draft for a thousand dollars. He could have used the money—but announced that he had sent it to the Fund for Aviators' Widows and Families and added:

"Huh! I guess if that wise guy Normanton can give his time and services to the science of aviation in a case like this, he hasn't got anything on *me!*"



"An excellent imitation," murmured Cheung Li Foo. Eldreth did not trust himself to speak—it was no imitation!

The Kang-he Poison Jar

Illustrated by Joseph Sabo

By

LEMUEL DE BRA

A deeply interesting story of mystery and adventure in China, by the able author of "The Return of Stiletto Sofie," and "Tears of the Poppy."

IT was in Shanghai that Eldreth, strolling into the Carleton Café one July evening, happened to meet his old enemy Hobart Witherill. Witherill represented an European firm specializing in imitations of valuable period porcelains. He and Eldreth had crossed swords several times and Hobe Witherill knew precisely what Eldreth thought of him and his methods.

There was a striking difference in the appearance of these two men as they stood for a moment eye to eye. Witherill, a stocky man with puffy face and cold eyes, betrayed dismay, then startled suspicion. Recovering, he greeted Eldreth effusively. He was just going to dine, he said; and Jim Eldreth was the very man he wanted to see.

"Besides," Witherill went on in his dry, rasping voice, "I want you to meet Tai Wo. Smart chap. Been everywhere and knows everything. Has heard a lot about you and is crazy to meet you."

Eldreth, tugging thoughtfully at his neatly trimmed beard, nodded agreement and followed Witherill. That beard, by the way, made Eldreth—he was only thirty-five—appear fifteen years older. In several tight pinches it had enabled him to pass as a physician or a missionary.

Dining with Hobe Witherill was not Eldreth's idea of a pleasant hour, but he was curious to meet Tai Wo and doubly curious to know why Witherill had acted so strangely. That talk about wanting to see Eldreth was obviously false; but now that Eldreth had walked into the scene, Witherill had shown a suspicious eagerness to give Tai Wo a chance to get a look at him.

The table to which a waiter led the two Americans was in a corner removed

from the other diners. At sight of them, Tai Wo arose, bowed gravely to Witherill, then turned his smoky eyes on Eldreth in a penetrating stare. Witherill made the introduction in his usual pompous manner. Eldreth did not offer to shake hands, and Tai Wo obviously had not expected him to.

"It's a real pleasure to make your acquaintance, Mr. Eldreth," said Tai Wo in perfectly enunciated English—so perfect as to indicate a long residence abroad. "One cannot live long in China without hearing of you."

Eldreth smiled but said nothing. One look at Tai Wo had put him on his guard.

"What's up, Eldreth?" Witherill exclaimed when he had dispatched the waiter for Scotch and seltzer. "On my trail again?"

"That depends," replied Eldreth, lighting a cigarette.

Witherill started, a calculating glint in his cold eyes. Then he turned to Tai Wo. "I suppose you know that Eldreth's specialty is old porcelains. When some wealthy collector in New York or London or Paris—it doesn't matter where—wants a certain piece to complete a collection, the order eventually gets to the Hudspill Oriental Antique Corporation. If they haven't the thing in stock, they cable Eldreth. It's his job to locate what they want—*and get it!*"

TAI WO was putting a match to a slender brown cigarette. Now his smoky eyes flashed to Witherill's face, lighted with swift comprehension, then came back to the flame of his match. It was over in a split second; but few things got by Jim Eldreth.

"Very interesting work, I imagine," said Tai Wo.

"Interesting!" echoed Witherill, filling his glass. "It's fascinating! And dangerous! You know, you Chinks have been making porcelains for almost two thousand years. Why, you might collect a thousand pieces, a thousand beautiful vases, for instance, and have no two alike in execution, coloring, or design! Eldreth has become a regular sharp at that stuff. One of his books dealing with the Kang-he period is a recognized authority in all the museums of the world."

Tai Wo nodded—and Eldreth smiled. Did they really think he was so stupid? All this talk was merely a smoke-screen to cover the exchange of some message. Eldreth decided that his cue was to keep still and listen.

Nothing more was said until Witherill had given the order for dinner. Then, after a silence, Tai Wo spoke:

"Getting back to our old porcelains—I suppose the oldest and most valuable specimens are now in museums and private collections?"

"Most of them," replied Witherill. "But every now and then we find one in some out of the way corner in China. That is, Eldreth does. I don't go in for originals—much. Copies serve my purpose better. But originals, worth sometimes as much as twenty-five thousand dollars, are frequently found where a white man's life isn't worth twenty-five cents. Makes your work interesting, eh, Jim?"

"I get a little excitement occasionally," replied Eldreth smiling. "For instance, right now I'm on the trail of a valuable Kang-he jar."

Eldreth could hardly restrain a chuckle at the way that random shot went home. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Witherill and Tai Wo exchange exultant glances; then both men looked quickly at him.

"I thought something was up!" exclaimed Witherill. "Jim, is it possible that you are on the trail of that old Kang-he Poison-jar?"

"Quite possible," smiled Eldreth.

"Somewhere up the Yang-tze, eh?"

Eldreth nodded. That was near enough the truth, for in Shanghai one is forever hearing of something "up the river."

"I was in Hankow a short time ago," went on Witherill over a mouthful of duck with pineapple. "Looking up some *blue-and-white*. And I heard whispers of a real Kang-he supposed to be hidden in some old shop down Lake Po Yang way. Real Kang-hes are not so scarce, of course; but this one is claimed to be the original poison-jar made especially for old Kang-he, himself. That the one you been hearing about, Jim?"

"That's the one," Eldreth admitted, still smiling.

AGAIN Eldreth caught Witherill and Tai Wo exchanging glances. "Not particularly in my line, you know," Witherill went on; "but tell me what you know about it, Jim, and maybe I can help you."

Eldreth sipped thoughtfully at his scald-

ing tea. There were Kang-hes in most collections; but the Kang-he Poison Jar —imperial yellow with a green dragon that was supposed to poison the tea if any hand save the emperor's touched it—that would be the find of a life-time! Had Witherill actually got on the trail of that jar? Or was this just some trap?

"I don't know much—yet," said Eldreth. "In fact, it was only very recently that I stumbled on to what may be a clue as to its whereabouts. And that may be false. The Kang-he Poison-jar may not be within a thousand miles of Lake Po Yang. It may not even be in existence today. Sometimes people will tell you one thing when the truth is exactly the opposite. But I'm going to learn the truth before long—and get the jar. By the way, how's golf? Crashed the gate at the *Hoong-Jeu* yet?"

Witherill made a wry face. The *Hoong-Jeu* was the most exclusive course in Shanghai.

"Be my guest tomorrow forenoon," Eldreth went on. He knew that if he could get any more information out of Hobe Witherill it would be over a game of golf.

But, to Eldreth's surprise, Witherill never mentioned the subject all morning, and he appeared to have lost all interest when Eldreth brought it up. He played a choppy game, as usual, talked much about the good connections he had made through his membership in the various clubs; but of the Kang-he Poison-jar —not a word. And Eldreth was puzzled. What was it all about? And where did Tai Wo come in?

"Dinner on me," said Eldreth—he had permitted Witherill to win. "Carleton suit?"

"Sure. By the way, I have an engagement that may make me a bit late. You wont mind waiting?"

"Of course not! And bring your friend, Tai Wo, if you wish."

Witherill looked up quickly. "I may," he said, "but I doubt if I see him."

They parted. Eldreth went back to his hotel and at once sent for his chief servant, a man named Sin Foy from the province of Hupeh. Sin Foy, at first glance, would be mistaken for an ordinary coolie; but a close observer would notice that beneath the loose-flowing blue gown was a wiry and powerful frame that stood almost proudly erect and that the dark face and steady eyes were alight with more than ordinary intelligence.

"Sin Foy, you remember the white man, Witherill? Good! I am to dine with him this evening at the Carleton. When we leave, you are to follow him. You understand?"

Sin Foy bowed.

"And did you ever know a native named Tai Wo?"

"Tai Wo!" came in startled whisper from Sin Foy's lips. "A thief! A swindler! A man so dishonorable he would murder his own father for a Shanghai dollar; a man who—"

"Never mind! Put Chun on his trail. That's all."

Again Sin Foy bowed. When he left, Eldreth went downstairs to the hotel office to inquire about the next steamer for Hankow.

NO word came from Chun that afternoon. At six, Eldreth took a ricksha for the Carleton, and was surprised to find Tai Wo waiting at the entrance.

"Mr. Eldreth," said the Oriental quietly, his smoky eyes glancing quickly up and down the street, "I have been waiting for you. I did not know where you were staying, so took a chance that you would return here for dinner this evening. Are you to meet Mr. Witherill here?"

"Yes," said Eldreth, wondering what this was all about.

"Then I must speak with you privately before he comes. It would not do for Mr. Witherill to see us together. Come with me, please! I shall keep you only a moment."

Tai Wo swung down the street, leaving Eldreth to follow. Just around the corner was the *Singing Bird* tea room. Tai Wo stepped inside, waited for Eldreth. Evidently the Oriental had prepared the way, for the waiter bowed, motioned them to a screened booth, served tea, then left them alone.

"It is not the Chinese way, Mr. Eldreth," said Tai Wo, lighting a cigarette; "but I shall come at once to the point. How much will you pay me if I tell you where you can find that royal Kang-he Poison-jar?"

Eldreth made no attempt to conceal his astonishment.

"So that's it! Well—I don't know. Have you already sold that information to Witherill?"

"Don't be insulting!" flared Tai Wo, his smoky eyes flaming. "I was about to make a bargain with Mr. Witherill last evening when you arrived on the scene. Now I have come to you because, frankly, I trust you and I do not trust Mr. Witherill."

"Thanks," said Eldreth curtly. "What's your proposition?"

"A fair one—I believe you will agree. I am willing to tell you all I know. If you get the Kang-he, and if it proves to be the original Poison-jar, then you can pay me whatever you think my tip has been worth."

"Providing, of course, I live long enougb after I get the Poison-jar!"

Tai Wo smiled, and waved that aside. "I'm not worrying about you being able to take care of yourself. Is it a bargain?"

ELDRETH hesitated. If Tai Wo was playing square, here was a chance to beat Hobe Witherill again. On the face of it, Tai Wo seemed to be making a straightforward proposition. Eldreth began to wonder if he had fought plots and intrigue so long that he was seeing tbem where none existed.

A moment's reflection convinced him that whatever the game, his cue was to accept Tai Wo's terms and play the cards dealt him, so be said it was a bargain.

"Very good, Mr. Eldreth," said tbe Oriental gravely. "And now listen. You have been to King-teh-chen, of course. Go there and find the pottery shop of Cheung Li Foo. It is better that I not tell you where it is. Wander around for several days and pretend to be seeking no one in particular. Do not under any circumstances mention a Kang-he jar. You understand?"

Eldreth nodded. Such tactics were nothing new to him.

"When you finally approach Cheung Li Foo you must be very cautious. For here is the point: I have seen that jar, I had it in my hands; and I believe it is tbe genuine original Poison-jar; but Cheung Li Foo thinks it is *only a very clever imitation*. You understand?"

"I see! Why didn't you buy it?"

"Because even as an imitation, Cheung Li Foo values it highly. Tbe price he named was at that time far too much for me. Besides, I am no expert; that piece may be only an imitation. If so, it isn't worth balf what that old robber asks for it; but if genuine—ah! And you would know at once, eh?"

Eldreth nodded. Fifteen years' experience had trained his fingers to know tbe *feel* of tbe genuine porcelain.

"Well, there you are!" concluded Tai Wo. "You can bargain witb Cheung Li Foo. He will tell you he doesn't wish to sell; but that's a lie. He is so greedy for money he would sell one of bis sons if you offered enough. And he's crafty. Don't hold me responsible if you make a bad bargain!"

"Certainly not! You've done your part; the rest is up to me. King-teh-chen! The pottery shop of Cheung Li Foo! All right, Tai! I'll do it. And when I come back—with the royal Kang-be Poison-jar—wbere'll I find you?"

Tai Wo smiled.

"How can one know? I am a buyer for several export houses. My business often takes me to remote places in the interior. At this time of the year I am usually sent to look over the tobacco crop. Besides, you can not say how long you will be gone. Perhaps"—again Tai Wo smiled—"you may not get the jar, may not even get out of King-teh-chen alive! But—if you do—I suggest that when you get back to Shanghai you put a discreet advertisement in the *Shanghai Gazette*."

"Good enough," agreed Eldreth, curious over the elaborate way Tai Wo had of concealing his Shanghai address. "If nothing happens to prevent it I shall take the boat for Hankow tomorrow morning."

"My good wishes go with you," said Tai Wo, rising. "I shall not accompany you out. It is best that we not be seen together. And remember, please do not discuss this witb Mr. Witherill. *Ho hang la!*"

"*Ts'ing la!*" rejoined Eldreth, and left.

SUSPECTING that Tai Wo or some one migbt be watching, Eldreth did not look around but went direct to the Carleton.

Witherill was at a table, waiting. "Hello!" said Eldreth. "Where's your friend, Tai Wo?"

"Haven't seen him today," Witherill returned, picking up the menu card. "Glad I didn't keep you waiting."

"No, I've been busy myself. Leaving on the morning boat for Hankow."

"Hankow! On tbe trail of that Kang-he jar?"

"Maybe. Want to go along?"

"Not me! But I'm wishing you success!"

During the meal Witherill did not mention the Kang-he. He talked nervously on many subjects, seemed preoccupied over something.

"I'm on the trail of some Fuchien white," he said as they parted at the door. "May not be in Shanghai when you get back. If I am, I hope you'll let me have a peep at that jar."

"I haven't got it yet," Eldreth evaded. "Good luck to you!"

Witherill waved a pudgy hand, and hurried off down the street. Eldreth crossed to a waiting ricksha. He did not look back.

Arrived at his hotel, Eldreth paid his bill and let it be known that he would take the boat for Hankow in the morning; then he went to his room and began packing.

Half an hour later came a light tapping on his door, and Sin Foy walked in.

"Master, the white man you call Witherill went no farther than the first corner. There he turned and watched until your ricksha was out of sight; then he went back past the Carleton and around the corner to the *Singing Bird* tea room. There he met Tai Wo."

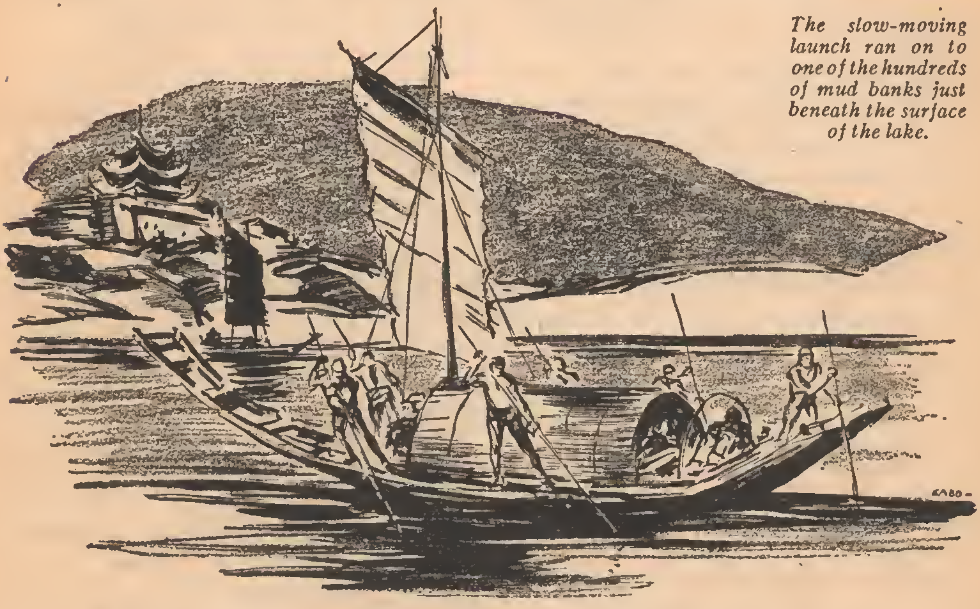
"Tai Wo! So they are working together! You heard what they said?"

"Everything, sir; but it was all in that horrible French—which you have often promised to teach me but never—"

Eldreth snapped his fingers in vexation. "I might have known! Chun followed when Tai Wo left?"

"Yes sir. And I followed the white man. He is living at the Astor. During the few minutes that I waited, he made no plans for leaving."

"Well, we're leaving. Be ready in an hour."



The slow-moving launch ran on to one of the hundreds of mud banks just beneath the surface of the lake.

JIM ELDRETH lighted a cigarette. What was their game? Just a cheap plot to get him out of Shanghai? Or was there really an imperial Kang-he jar up at King-teh-chen that for some reason they wanted him to get? Or was the whole thing a trap? "Damned interesting situation!" muttered Eldreth; "and just to make it a little more interesting I'll fool them on the first move!"

That night two rickshas slipped quietly into the dark alley at the rear of Eldreth's hotel, took on Eldreth, Sin Foy, and their bags, and vanished in the direction of the Shanghai-Nanking Railway station. "As you know," Eldreth said to Sin Foy when they had boarded a fast night train, "it takes a boat almost thirty hours to run from Shanghai around to Nanking. This way we make it in less than seven. We'll catch the boat that left here early

this morning. Tomorrow morning when Tai Wo doesn't see us board the boat at Shanghai he may figure all this out; but by that time we'll be twenty-four hours ahead of him."

"I hope you are right," said Sin Foy solemnly; "but remember—no white man ever got ahead of Tai Wo yet."

Jim Eldreth fingered his neatly trimmed beard and considered that thoughtfully!

IT had been five years since Eldreth had made his last trip to King-teh-chen and after boarding the steamer at Nanking he got out his maps to refresh his memory and see just what he had undertaken. He knew that from Shanghai to Hankow by boat was a three-day trip approximating six hundred miles. He had cut that distance over two hundred miles by taking the train to Nanking, the first important port up the river. Ahead of him was still about four hundred miles on the broad and busy Yangtze before he would see Hankow. There he would get credentials from the American consul because King-teh-chen was in the Hankow consular district. Then a hundred and fifty miles back down the river to Kiukiang; ninety miles by rail south from Kiukiang to Nanchang; then a hundred and twenty miles by boat across Lake Po Yang and up North River to his destination. None of the distances were great, as distances go in China; but Eldreth knew from previous experience that the trip from Nanchang to King-teh-chen alone would take longer and would involve more hazards than the trip from New York to San Francisco.

When the boat docked at Kiukiang—still almost a day from Hankow—Eldreth went ashore and found a telegram awaiting him from Chun. It read:

Man going King-teh-chen following danger plenty.

Eldreth smiled. "So Tai Wo has started for King-teh-chen. Chun is following him, and has learned something that makes him think I am in 'plenty danger.' That's nice!"

He started back to the boat but on sudden impulse changed his mind. King-teh-chen was about two hundred miles southeast; Hankow a hundred and fifty miles in the opposite direction. Wasn't there some way to save that three hundred mile round trip? Eldreth knew the American consul and decided to try it. He sent a wire, then hastened to the boat and had Sin Foy bring off their bags. On learning that there was a train leaving in less than an hour, Eldreth made arrangements for the trip and put Sin Foy and their luggage aboard.

The boat was many miles up the river, and the train was ready to pull out, when Eldreth got his answer from Hankow.

Signed "American consulate," it read:

Consul absent. Trouble in King-teh-chen district. All foreigners warned to stay out.

"Huh!" grunted Eldreth, tearing the message to bits. "Damned thoughtful of them!" He tossed the pieces over his shoulder and swung aboard the moving train.

Nanchang was only ninety miles south, but Eldreth was not surprised that it took the train all day to make the run. Arriving at Nanchang late that afternoon, he made inquiries at once for a boat crossing Lake Po Yang. There was none until the next forenoon. The delay was annoying, but it couldn't be helped. And anyway, Tai Wo would have to follow the same route. "If I can just keep ahead of him I'm satisfied," Eldreth told Sin Foy as they boarded the antiquated steam launch the next forenoon. "I'm not afraid of him, and I haven't any idea what he's getting me into; but if there really is an imperial Kang-he up there I want to get it and see it safely on its way to London. A thrashing wouldn't bother Tai Wo; but to outwit him—that would hurt! Eh, Sin Foy?"

"You speak wisdom," said Sin Foy solemnly; "but remember—a hidden snake is doubly dangerous."

"Like the mud hills of Lake Po Yang, eh?" smiled Eldreth. "I hope we don't get hung up—as usual!"

But they did—just as usual. About mid-afternoon the slow-moving launch ran on to one of the hundreds of mud banks that lie just beneath the surface of the lake. At first the Chinese boatmen worked furiously, shouting excitedly, and getting in each other's way; then they gave up and calmly sat down to wait. Another boat would come tomorrow!

WAITING there under a cloudless sky and a blazing July sun did not appeal to Jim Eldreth and he promptly took a hand. The Chinese were quick to

recognize a man who knew his business and in less than a half hour the boat was afloat again. But by that time the boiler was foaming dangerously. Investigation showed that it hadn't been cleaned for a year and was half full of mud. It took Eldreth and the Chinese engineer over an hour to get the boiler in condition, which left scarcely two hours' travel before dark.

It was noon the next day when they sighted Juichow, the main port on the east side of the lake. Here Eldreth and the other passengers bound for King-teh-chen —all Chinese—transferred to a smaller boat. After wrangling for an hour over the purchase of supplies, they were about to shove off when some one shouted: *"P'ao Ch'uan! P'ao Ch'uan!"*

Eldreth swore under his breath. Right then a police boat was the last thing he wished to see; but it could not be avoided. Ten minutes later the officious police captain was announcing in a shrill voice that the boat could go on but that the "white foreign devil" must go back.

Assuming an attitude of insulted dignity, Eldreth coolly ordered the boat to wait, and drew the police captain aside. A little persuasion, backed up by a tip that was more than the police captain earned in six months, did the work. To Eldreth's amusement the captain announced that the "white foreign devil" would be permitted to go on the boat and he, himself, would accompany him as bodyguard!

"You do me a great honor," Eldreth said, restraining a smile. "And, by the way, I learned something in Nanchang that you'd better tell your men. A native named Tai Wo"—Eldreth described him minutely—"murdered a police boat captain up at Kiukiang. They say he's headed for King-teh-chen. Probably you've been told to look out for him."

"I have not, sir," the captain answered gravely; "but I shall tell my men to wait here for him. They will arrest him and take him back to Kiukiang at once."

"Warn your men to be careful and to pay no attention to anything Tai Wo says. They say he is—" Eldreth tapped his forehead suggestively.

"I understand, sir," said the little captain. He turned to shout orders to his men. Eldreth, chuckling to himself, boarded the boat. Ten minutes later they were off, and presently they turned from the lake to battle against the fierce current of North River.

Ahead of them was almost three days' hard journey, for King-teh-chen lies in the heart of the mountains away up near the Anhwei border. All that night the boatmen struggled against the swift current, now paddling furiously, then working their long poles, and then running along the banks pulling the boat with ropes. Once Eldreth, half asleep on his mattress in the middle section of the boat, thought he heard some one screaming as if in pain; but it proved to be only the boatmen singing to placate the water spirits!

On the following morning they began meeting boats going down stream with cargoes of porcelain. At times the river seemed crowded with them, which was no surprise to Eldreth; for he knew that over five million dollars' worth of pottery a year floated down that wild mountain stream. On the next day they began passing slow craft loaded with wood and straw for the kilns of King-teh-chen. With every mile as they ascended higher into the mountains the water grew clearer; and on the morning of the third day after leaving Lake Po Yang, Eldreth began noticing countless pieces of defective and broken porcelain strewn along the sandy bottom of the river, fragments that for all he knew might have been many centuries old, for porcelain was being made in King-teh-chen a thousand years before Columbus discovered America.

ABOUT noon on that third day the river seemed suddenly to widen. This, Eldreth remembered, was due to the junction of the two streams that form North River. Ahead, lying between these two rivers, in a frame of beautiful hills dotted with pine camphor, and bamboo trees, the sun gleaming on its hundreds of smoking chimneys, was the ancient city of King-teh-chen, the porcelain center of the entire world.

Carefully the boatmen edged their way through the swarm of wood boats, pottery boats, and huge, flat-bottomed craft loaded with white clay bricks, and finally docked at the foot of one of the hundreds of high mounds of discarded pottery that line the river bank. Eldreth, with the police captain at his side, and Sin Foy at his heels, clambered to the top of the mound, then turned to say good-by to the little captain. The boat would start on its return trip as soon as it could re-provision; and the police captain was

to go with it back to his post on Lake Po Yang.

"Bu k'ai t'ung!" warned the little captain, swinging his arms in an all-embracing gesture toward the smoky city that spread before them far back to the foothills. "This town is not open to communication!"

"I know," said Eldreth. "And I'm sorry you must go back; but I believe I can get along. Here!" He handed over another liberal tip, then, followed by Sin Foy carrying the luggage, hurried through the tangle of warehouses, kilns, shops and residences that fronted the river, and came to the first of the two main streets. Here Eldreth, knowing there were no foreign hotels in King-teh-chen, sought a quiet native inn and engaged rooms. Tai Wo had advised him to stroll around several days before approaching the shop of Cheung Li Foo; but Eldreth had decided to act on his own judgment. As soon as they had eaten, he sent Sin Foy to locate Cheung Li Foo. Sin could do that without arousing any curiosity.

EVER since Tai Wo had told him about the imperial Kang-he supposed to be in the shop of Cheung Li Foo, Eldreth had been puzzling his mind over that name. It had a familiar sound, yet he could not recall the man. He hoped that Cheung Li Foo did not know him.

Sin Foy was not gone long.

"Master," he said apologetically, "I am very sorry that I could learn nothing about Cheung Li Foo except that he is very wealthy, has three wives, seven sons, and fifty-two grandsons, that forty-seven of them work for the Kiangsi Pottery Company, that Cheung Li Foo once cheated a white foreign devil out of three thousand dollars, that he smokes nine pipes of opium a day, that in his shop he makes excellent round ware, that when he lives a hundred years more he will be twice as old as he is now but could never be twice as wicked, that—"

"Never mind!" interposed Eldreth, familiar with the Chinese love of petty gossip. "Where's his shop?"

"Not half a *li* from here, Master. It fronts on this street. The rear is on an alley that leads down to the river. In his retail department he employs four clerks whose names are—"

"Enough!" Eldreth broke in. "Follow me, but do not appear to notice me."

Eldreth struck out afoot. No use, he knew, to waste time hunting one of the few rickshas; for the narrow, winding streets were so thronged with the thousands of workers going to and from the kilns and shops that rickshas had been condemned as obstructions to traffic! Even traveling afoot, Eldreth found his way blocked every now and then by groups of men wrangling excitedly over something; and once he came upon what appeared to be a serious riot. Eldreth turned into a side-street and went far around, and, suddenly, he remembered that warning message from Hankow. So there really was trouble in King-teh-chen!

THE entrance to the pottery shop of Cheung Li Foo was like a hundred others Eldreth had passed—a narrow door flanked on each side by barred windows before which were heaped piles of pottery. Inside, on the left, was a long counter, also piled high with products of the kiln. On the right, and in the rear, half-naked workmen were busily engaged in wrapping pottery in rice straw and packing in shipping boxes.

The fact that Cheung Li Foo specialized in "round ware"—cups, saucers, and plates—explained to Eldreth why he had passed up this shop on his previous visits. Also it warned him that since Cheung Li Foo did not deal in vases and jars, if he really had a valuable antique from the Kang-he period he would probably be aware of its value and would drive a sharp bargain, even though that antique were only a clever imitation.

At the end of the counter Eldreth discovered an old man sitting where he could watch both the street door and the workmen. Just now his watery old eyes were on the white man with a look of mingled suspicion and cupidity. As Eldreth stopped, the man arose, laid down his pipe, and drew a bony claw through his ragged gray beard. "You seek something, sir?" he spoke in perfect English.

Eldreth was astonished. Here was a "closed" city of three hundred thousand, without electric lights or telephones, without even a single newspaper; yet the ancient keeper of an obscure pottery shop spoke excellent English!

"I do, sir," replied Eldreth. "I seek Cheung Li Foo."

"I am Cheung Li Foo," said the Oriental, bowing gravely.



Sin Foy had seized the official. Eldreth struck a terrific blow, catching the yellow man beneath the ear.

"I am honored to meet you," said Eldreth, also bowing. "I am in the export business in Shanghai. A business acquaintance advised me to call on you, said you were the oldest man in King-teh-chen, and that you knew everything."

Again Cheung Li Foo bowed solemnly.

"It may be true that I have seen more years than any other man in King-teh-chen; but that I know everything—ah, that is not given to mortal man! What is your friend's honorable family name, sir?"

"His name," said Eldreth, watching the old man's face, "is Tai Wo."

"Tai Wo?" Cheung Li Foo shook his head. "I do not recall him. But, then, many men have come to my shop. What do I know that can be of service to you, sir? You wish to purchase round ware, perhaps? I have some excellent pieces."

Eldreth shook his head. He was sure now that whatever game Witherill and Tai Wo were playing, Cheung Li Foo had no part in it. He resolved to get right down to business.

"No, I am not interested in round ware. I have a slight knowledge of ceramics; and I am eager to find the oldest piece in King-teh-chen. Also I am prepared to buy if I find what I want."

Slowly, Cheung Li Foo's bony claw reached for his pipe. His withered lips sucked on the amber stem while his sharp eyes studied the white man's face.

"It is hard to say what one might find," he spoke finally. "Many very valuable pieces from various periods have been unearthed in the old shops of King-teh-chen. There may be more; but who can say? You wish to buy for your own collection—or to sell?"

Eldreth gave the old man a knowing smile. "I would sell if I could make a good profit."

"Ah! That is business, of course! Well, then, perhaps you would be interested in a most remarkable imitation I picked up some time ago. Since you know porcelain, you will recognize it as only a clever copy; but you might have a customer who— Accompany me, sir!"

CHEUNG LI FOO led the way around a heap of packing-boxes to a partitioned-off corner that evidently served as an office. On the left of the doorway was a desk, and a small, old-fashioned safe of French make. On the right were several stools. Against the rear wall was a long table beside which stood a clerk wrapping packages. The old man motioned Eldreth to one of the stools, and bent over the safe.

"I keep my copy here because while it is only an imitation it is a valuable curiosity," Cheung Li Foo spoke over his shoulder as he tugged at the huge key of the inner door. "I wonder if you will value it as highly as I do! Ah!"

He turned around. Slowly, as if loath to entrust his treasure to this stranger, Cheung Li Foo extended his bony hands. Eldreth started involuntarily, then with an effort suppressed his excitement. Clutched tightly in the old, long-nailed claws, was a round, irregular-shaped jar of vivid, living yellow—the imperial yellow of the famous Kang-he period!

Carefully, almost reverently, Eldreth took the jar from the old man's hands and turned it around. Yes, there the yellow background was broken by a writhing dragon—the imperial five-clawed dragon done in a brilliant green with overtones of glossy black.

"An excellent imitation, my friend," murmured Cheung Li Foo.

Eldreth nodded. He did not dare trust himself to speak; for the instant his sensitive fingers had passed over the glaze of that jar, and his experienced eyes had studied the workmanship, he knew beyond a doubt that this was no imitation. Tai Wo was right. This was a genuine Kang-he. It was the *original Kang-he Poison-jar!*

And Eldreth was surprised. Not that Cheung Li Foo did not recognize this as an original, for Eldreth had long since learned that Chinese shopkeepers were often ignorant of the true value of their own porcelains. What surprised him was that Cheung Li Foo did not try to sell him this "imitation" as an original.

"Of course," went on Cheung Li Foo as Eldreth appeared to hesitate, "this is not the oldest piece in King-teh-chen. In time you could probably find a Ming—which preceded the Kang-he period. Or you might possibly find a genuine Kang-he. Most authorities agree that the greatest perfection was achieved in porcelains during the reign of Kang-he. This imitation is probably not very old; but interesting, is it not?"

"The buyer does not praise," said Eldreth, smiling. "What is your price?"

"My price? Ah, we shall not haggle over my price, nor hasten to bargain. It is a pleasure to meet one who appreciates our porcelains. I suppose you know the story of the original Kang-he Poison-jar? Kang-he—known in your histories as K'ang Hsi—was very fond of a delicately flavored jasmine tea that was grown especially for him in the imperial tea gardens. Although no one was supposed to use the imperial yellow-ware save royalty, the emperor one day discovered servants drinking his jasmine tea from his own bowls. Furious, he sent for the royal potter—and the original of this jar was made. As the story goes, should any hand save the emperor's touch the tea, the dragon immediately became violently angry and blew his poison breath on the tea leaves being removed, so that all who drank the tea brewed from those leaves died in frightful agony. Only a story, of course; but it adds interest to the jar. What became of the original—no one knows. This copy, probably made from descriptions handed down from family to family, was found among the old stuff in this shop when I bought it some years ago. I do not like to part with it, but I happen to be in need of funds just now. So I shall make you a very reasonable price—say five thousand dollars, gold."

ELDRETH hesitated. Five thousand dollars! That was a frightful price to pay for a copy—a hundred times what an imitation would be worth. But the original! Eldreth had seen Kang-he jars less valuable than this one sell for close to thirty thousand dollars.

Suddenly, from the front of the store, came the sounds of a brawl in the streets; and Eldreth decided. He would buy the jar and get out of King-teh-chen at once.

"Make out a bill of sale," said Eldreth, putting the jar on the desk. "I will give you a draft on the Hankow branch of the International Banking Corporation."

"That is satisfactory," Cheung Li Foo said. He handed the jar to the clerk to be wrapped, then took a sheet of paper and began writing. After asking Eldreth's name and address—which was given as "J. W. Lancaster, Astor Hotel, Shanghai"—Cheung Li Foo wrote for a moment, then with a fan dried the ink. When the clerk gave him the package, he tucked the paper beneath the string, handed the package to Eldreth and took Eldreth's draft.

"It is well wrapped," said Cheung Li Foo, "but handle it carefully! Although it is now yours, I should grieve to hear that my jar had been broken. And, by the way, if you are to be in King-teh-chen long, you must come and see me. At my home I have a few excellent pieces from the Yung-ching and Keen-lung periods. Also I have a small but genuine Ming. They are not for sale," he added,

rising; "but I shall be happy to show them to you."

Eldreth thanked him, and explained that he was obliged to leave on the first boat. He started to ask what the trouble was in King-teh-chen but was afraid that might start the old man on a long-winded discussion of internal politics. Tucking his package under his arm, he said good-by to Cheung Li Foo, and left, a bit suspicious that the deal had gone through so easily and wondering just what would happen next.

He was not long finding out. Followed by Sin Foy, whom he found waiting outside, Eldreth had gone what would be about two American blocks when he heard a rustling behind him and a hand clutched his arm. Eldreth jerked around, and saw the black satin blouse and round, red-buttoned cap of a petty court official. The official said something in a tone that was decidedly unfriendly. Eldreth, familiar with most of the Chinese dialects, understood that he was being asked as to his business in the city, but he chose to pretend ignorance, and signaled for Sin Foy.

"Tell him that I am an American connected with the Hankow consulate," Eldreth directed Sin Foy. "Say that we are leaving for Hankow on the first boat and that my credentials are at my hotel."

The official bowed, and smiled craftily. Of course, he did not question the American's statement! And of course, while the servant went to the hotel for the credentials, the American would graciously accompany the official to the magistrate where all would no doubt be explained in due time.

Eldreth fumed, but held silent. It wouldn't do to get into an argument. Besides—and this instantly aroused Eldreth's suspicions—the official was eying the package under the white man's arm. Queer he should be interested in that!

"You tell this big crook that I am highly honored to accompany him to court," Eldreth said to Sin Foy. "Then you start off as if going to our hotel, but stick around. I may need you in a minute."

SIN FOY, with many polite bows, addressed the officer in his most servile tone, then hastened away. The officer motioned insolently for the white man to walk ahead of him down the street. Eldreth struck out, realizing that this arrangement put him at a disadvantage but that it gave Sin Foy a good chance for an attack.

They had reached a busy corner, and the official had just turned his prisoner down a crowded street that led to the river, when Eldreth heard Sin Foy call out: "Master!"

Eldreth whirled. Sin Foy had seized the official by an arm, turning him half around. Eldreth struck a terrific blow, catching the yellow man just beneath the ear. Sin Foy, knowing what would happen, was gone when the official hit the walk and Eldreth was dashing through the nearest doorway. Behind him there was an uproar; but before any one could move to stop him, Eldreth was out the rear door into the alley. There he walked unhurriedly to the street and on toward his hotel, where he found Sin Foy waiting.

"What now, Master?" asked Sin Foy when they were in Eldreth's room. "That official will go at once to the chief magistrate. All inns will be searched. We—"

"Don't you worry about that!" smiled Eldreth, unwrapping his package. "That crook wont go any farther than Cheung Li Foo's store. Don't you see the game? Cheung Li Foo lets his victims walk off with this Kang-he Poison-jar, then that crook in the guise of an official works some scheme to steal the jar. Made me mad when I realized that I had almost fallen for that old trick! That's why I hit that fake official so hard. Hope I didn't smash this—" Eldreth broke off, an astounded expression on his face.

"Master!" cried Sin Foy in alarm; "is it broken?"

Eldreth smiled bitterly. "Might as well be! Guess I'm getting old, Sin Foy. Queer! I watched every move that clerk made. Mighty slick piece of palming he did! Ditched the original jar and handed me this copy they probably make by the dozen."

There was a tense silence; then: "Hell, damn!" breathed Sin Foy, his slant eyes wide. "Hell, damn, Master! What you do now? You go quick and have him arrested, eh?"

Eldreth shook his head. "No use! There was no talk of selling me the original jar. Cheung Li Foo said plainly he was selling me an imitation. This bill of sale calls for an imitation. No, after fifteen years I've been neatly swindled.

Huh! Think I see now why Witherill and Tai Wo steered me up against that old rascal! . . . . And maybe that official isn't in league with Cheung Li Foo! We may be arrested, after all! —Listen! Here's some money. Go find a man who owns a boat and will take us to Juichow. Pay him half his price and tell him to provision the boat and be at the nearest landing ready to leave at a minute's notice. And tell him to keep his mouth shut. Understand?"

Sin Foy nodded.

"All right! Then go to a store and buy yourself the clothes of a pottery worker. Buy me the clothes of a middle-class merchant. And get me a razor. Understand that?"

"Yes, Master. Then we are leaving King-teh-chen as soon as possible?"

"We are leaving as soon as I get that original Kang-he Poison-jar," corrected Eldreth dryly.

THAT night, after shaving off his beard, Eldreth slipped out a rear exit of the hotel and followed Sin Foy a quarter of a mile through winding streets to another native inn where arrangements had been made for lodgings. Four days later, Sin Foy, after wandering the streets in the guise of a pottery worker, reported that the trouble in King-teh-chen was merely a local labor disturbance; that no one knew where Cheung Li Foo had come from but that he spoke French as well as he did English or Chinese; and that the black-bearded American who had wantonly attacked a petty court official had mysteriously vanished and was believed to have fled across the Anhwei border.

On the morning of the fifth day a tall, dark, ample-waisted man wearing horn-rimmed glasses and the garments of a Chinese merchant walked briskly into the shop of Cheung Li Foo and presented a letter written in Chinese—by Sin Foy—introducing the bearer as a resident of the French Settlement at Shanghai who had come to King-teh-chen on an important business commission, the nature of which he would explain. On being addressed in French by Cheung Li Foo, the caller showed surprised delight and at once explained his mission.

Slowly Cheung Li Foo picked up his pipe. Three times his withered lips drew on the amber stem.

"An astonishing proposition! Who sent you to me, *monsieur?* Your letter is not addressed to me; nor is it signed."

The visitor explained patiently. The letter had not been intended for any certain one and the signature had been omitted as a precaution. Such matters were naturally of a delicate confidential nature. He had made discreet inquiries at several other shops but none of them knew of an artist who could do the necessary decorative work. And everywhere he had heard the work of Cheung Li Foo highly praised.

"Yes," admitted the old man, nodding his head slowly, "I do good work. And Ming vases can be imitated; but my workmen are not prepared to do it. Like the other shops, I know of no artist equal to the task."

The visitor was discouraged. He had a very attractive order for three Ming vases. There were no genuine Mings for sale at a reasonable figure. For this particular order, clever copies would serve as well—and be much more profitable to him. He turned to leave.

Cheung Li Foo laid down his pipe.

"One moment, *monsieur!* Could you use a Kang-he tea jar?"

"I could use anything that offers a chance for a nice profit."

The old man nodded. "I have no Ming ware, nor any genuine Kang-he; but I have an excellent imitation of the original Kang-he Poison-jar. I had not thought of selling it, but it may interest you. Would you like to see it?"

"I would," said Eldreth, and followed Cheung Li Foo back to the office.

FIVE minutes later Eldreth had the Kang-he Poison-jar in his own hands, was staring at it with assumed astonishment and cupidity.

"An excellent imitation, *monsieur,*" purred Cheung Li Foo. "You recognize it at once as such; but perhaps you have a customer who—" The old man spread his claw-like hands expressively.

Eldreth nodded. He looked around as if seeking a better light, then arose and stepped to the doorway. Neither Cheung Li Foo nor the clerk saw what happened.

"Oui, monsieur," said Eldreth, turning back from the doorway; "this thing is obviously an imitation. I don't want it."

A look of amused surprise came over the old man's face. Smiling, he took the jar from Eldreth's hand—and started



Eldreth shoved. There was a rumble that became a roar as half a ton of pottery toppled on the Chinese.

violently. His watery eyes flew wide as he stared at the jar.

Eldreth laughed. He took off his glasses, put them in a pocket in his blouse.

"Remember me now, Cheung Li Foo?" he said in English. "That's the cheap imitation you gave me the other day. The jar I bargained for, the real Kang-he Poison-jar you showed me just now, is here." Eldreth indicated the padding around his waist.

For a moment the old man stared; then, to Eldreth's surprise, he broke into a laugh and held out the imitation.

"Fairly beaten, my friend! Do me the honor to keep this as a souvenir!"

"I'll just do that!" agreed Eldreth. He stowed the jar in his padded belt.

"And now," went on Cheung Li Foo, his voice hardening, "I regret that I can not return your draft. I cashed it immediately after you left. But," he opened a drawer, "of course, I shall return your money—and you will give me my jar."

"Oh, no! I don't want the money! And you don't get the jar. You—"

Cheung Li Foo turned swiftly. His face suddenly black with rage, he struggled to his feet. Out of the corner of his eye, Eldreth saw the clerk turn from the table, in his hand the heavy knife he used in cutting the tough fiber cord.

"Better not start anything with me!" warned Eldreth quietly. "You tried to swindle me—as you have swindled others. I have respect for your age; but this Kang-he Poison-jar is too precious a relic to be in the hands of a crook like you. I'm sending it to a museum—where those who appreciate such beautiful things can enjoy its beauty. As soon as settlement is made, you'll get a fair price. Until then, keep your shirt on! *Ts'ing la!*"

ELDRETH turned toward the door. Cheung Li Foo snapped an order, and the clerk sprang at the white man. Expecting that, Eldreth whirled and backed out hastily, as if intending to run. Instead, he halted just out of sight. As the clerk, knife in hand, lunged through the doorway, Eldreth's fist caught him on the jaw, knocked him sprawling. With Cheung Li Foo yelling at the top of his voice, and workmen closing the front door, Eldreth, as he had previously planned, ran swiftly toward the rear.

Halfway to the main alley-door, two

husky, half-naked clay-truckers sprang in front of Eldreth. He struck them down, and ran on, stumbled over something and fell. With dismay, he heard a shattering tinkle.

The whole shop was now in an uproar. Workmen were rushing at him from all sides. Eldreth struggled up, drove his fist into the nearest face, and plunged through the gap only to discover that some one had shut the alley-door.

Whirling, Eldreth made a feint of running toward the front, swung around a heap of trimmings, and dashed up the stairway to the storage loft. Recalling what Sin Foy had told him about the "lay-out" of the shop, Eldreth looked toward the alley. Yes, the windows were closed. And that mob coming up the stairs would be at him before he could get to a window, open it and drop to the alley below.

Just beside the stairway opening was a huge stack of finished saucers. Eldreth dodged behind the stack and shoved with all his strength. The pile swayed, but it was heavier than Eldreth had thought. He tried again. There was a grinding, crackling rumble that suddenly became a roar as half a ton of pottery toppled over into the stairway, on to the heads of the Chinese, hurling them back down the steps in a tangled mass of flying legs and arms and broken saucers.

A moment later Eldreth had unlatched a window, dropped on to a heap of pottery refuse, and had joined Sin Foy. As rapidly as they could without attracting attention, the two headed for the river.

When they were off, the owner and his two men paddling steadily downstream, Eldreth turned his back to them and hastily unfastened his blouse. Had he had all that trouble for nothing? Or was it just the imitation jar that had broken when he fell? No, the imitation was all right. . . . . And so was the Kang-he Poison-jar! But his horn-rimmed glasses were shattered. With a laugh, Eldreth flung them into the river, and lighted a cigarette.

A BOAT came from the Juichow landing to meet them and in it was Chun. Chun looked at Sin Foy, whom he knew, then at the smooth-shaven man clad in Chinese garments, and smiled. Greetings over, Chun transferred to Eldreth's boat.

"We—Tai Wo and I—arrived at Nanchang the day after you left," he told Eldreth. "Two days later, the white man, Witherill, joined him. By pieces, I learned what had happened and what they planned to do.

"Witherill had been to King-teh-chen and to the pottery shop of Cheung Li Foo. He thought he saw a chance to swindle Cheung Li Foo but got swindled himself. He went back and tried to make trouble but could do nothing as the bill of sale called for an imitation jar. I see you know something about that!

"So he went back to Shanghai and told the story to Tai Wo. He wanted Tai Wo to help him steal the Kang-he Poison-jar, but eventually they conceived the scheme of getting you to go after it. They were to discuss the final details that night you happened on to Witherill at the Carleton. They knew that if any one could beat old Cheung Li Foo out of that jar, you could. If you did get stung, as Witherill put it, they would merely laugh at you; but if you succeeded in getting the genuine Kang-he Poison-jar they intended to steal it even if that meant murdering you."

"I thought the worst was not over!" Eldreth said. "Where did you leave 'em, Chun?"

Chun gestured toward the landing, now not a hundred feet distant. Eldreth turned around, and could not restrain a laugh. On the dock, bound hand and foot, and guarded by the little captain and his men, were both Tai Wo and Witherill!

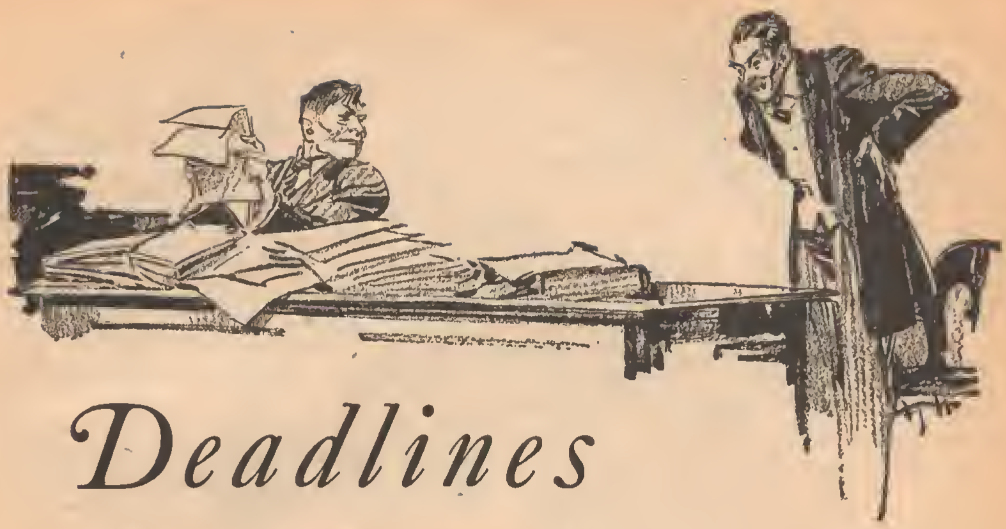
"We came on the boat not an hour ago," explained Chun. "Tai Wo was arrested at once. The white man interfered, and was also arrested. The captain will take them to Nanchang on the return boat tomorrow morning; but there is a smaller boat that leaves in half an hour—"

"Arrange for our passage!" Eldreth said quietly. "The captain probably wont get any farther than Nanchang before he learns the truth. By that time we'll be halfway to Canton. I'll be ready as soon as I slip the captain another tip for his services—and show his prisoners what I brought from King-teh-chen."

"Master," spoke up Sin Foy solemnly, "would you sell me that imitation jar?"

"Sell it to you? I'll give it to you, Sin Foy! But what on earth do you want with it?"

"Souvenir for Tai Wo. Hell, damn! That the first time he get beat!"



Deadlines

By SAMUEL McCOY

A right merry and diverting tale of a young man and a job that kept him in variegated and lively trouble.

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

DRIVE a car, don't you? Sure! Buy it on installments? Sure, plenty people do. Remember filling out a lot of questions about yourself, when you signed up for it? Yeah? Well, I'll make you a little bet there's one part of that contract blank that you *don't* remember—and that's that mess of small type that's printed above the page you filled out and above where you signed on the dotted line. Never read that small type, did you? No, of course you didn't—*nobody* does!

And why should they? That small type aint meant for *you*. You're on the level. You've got a good, regular job. You pay your bills, and you wouldn't sign nothin' you didn't mean to stick to, no more than you'd rob a bank. Well, most everybody is that way. Most everybody is on the level. Ninety-nine out of a hundred folks is. That's why the automobile company can take a chance on givin' them a car and gettin' paid for it later. But every once in a while the dealer gets fooled. Not often; maybe not more'n once in a thousand times. But this thousandth time—well, some slick bird comes in and signs up for a car and gets away with it. Or he thinks he does. He's kiddin' himself!

I'm tellin' you, because I *know* that business. I got me a try-out with the Wheelbase Finance Company the week after my twenty-third birthday—and that was four months ago. You've heard of the Wheelbase; sure you have! Does all the financing for the Monarch Corporation, and I guess you know what *that* means. Monarch sold darn' near a billion dollars' worth of cars last year, all models; and the Wheelbase finances every one of 'em that's bought on installments.

I'D been in the newspaper game, up to then. But I quit it. I quit it for several reasons—get me? One of 'em was, they always made me tell my story to somebody else. I could go out and *get* the story, all right; but when I come into the office, that's something else again. Do I sit down at the old typewriter and bang the story out? Not me! They wont let me! I never could get by with the copy-desk, somehow. Christmas, how those old boys would rave! I've seen old man Graves—baldheaded old hangnail he was, too—jump up from the copy-desk with a piece of my copy in his hand and throw it on the floor and stamp on it and carry on something terrible. I don't think they should 'a' let those old birds cuss the way they did—the copy boys

used to sit right alongside the copy-desk, waitin' to chase copy, and they was too young to have listen to such cussin'. No sir, it wasn't right!

So, after I got bawled out this way two or three times, they always made me dictate my story to somebody else. It kinda give me a pain. I'd go out and dig up the facts, do all the leg-work, get my story, get *everything!* And then when I come into the office and tell the city desk what I have, Jim Parrott—he's on the day city desk, then—he would yell over to some of these star performers sittin' around with their leg draped over the desk—pullin' down twice the money *I* was gettin' and they wouldn't know a story till somebody showed it to 'em—and he'd say, "Hey, Chollie, take this story from Joe Keogh! It's a bird—write it for a column!" So it goes into the paper the way he writes it, and he gets his name plastered all over the paper, and I get nothin'. It kinda give me a pain.

So, after a couple years of that sort of a deal, I quit 'em. Sure, what was the use of hangin' around? They's no money in reportin', anyway.

But, one thing I will say about the newspaper game, it sorta teaches you to hang on, know what I mean? You can't get by with excuses in that game. Most any other sort of business, if the boss tells you to go out and find somebody, you can come back and say you went there and the guy wasn't in, and that's all there is to it. A fat chance you would have to get by with that sort of an alibi with Jim Parrott! Try and do it!

You have to work and keep on workin', that's all. *I* never see none of this stuff they call brilliance in the newspaper game. Not while *I* was in it, leastways. The whole thing was just never admittin' you was licked. If you can't find out what you want to know in one place, you can always find out somewheres else. Just keep on tryin', that's all. You'd be surprised.

Another thing I got out of workin' on the old sheet was knowing what a deadline means. Yeah, I learned that. Know what a deadline in a newspaper office is? What it is just this: You can go out and round up all the news in the world, you can get you the swellest story that ever broke since Cain bumped off Abel—can get everything verified and the whole story sewed up cold—and if you don't get it into the office in time to print it that day, you've got just a hatful of nothin' at all! Get me? It aint news, not till it gets into the paper! And if the paper goes to press at 11:20, and the copy-desk deadline is 11:05, and you don't get your story written till 11:06, you may've done everything—but you aint done *nothin'!* Deadlines is deadlines, and nothin' else but!

BUT they wont let me write my own stuff, so I quit 'em. And the first job I lands is just a try-out with the Wheelbase, in the collection department. That department takes up one whole floor. Big as a railroad station. One side of the room has a line of steel filing-cases and typewriter desks a mile long, with a girl at every one of 'em. The gum that's chewed there in one day would stretch from San Francisco to London, if laid end to end. And then there's the collectors' desks and a hundred I don't know what all. Christmas! There must've been a couple of hundred workin' in there! And off at one corner, about a half-mile away from my desk, is a couple of little offices shut off with glass partitions. One of them is the manager DeWay's, and the other one is for the assistant manager, W. L. McClippey.

I sit there for a week, with nothing to do but read up old reports, till I'm like to fall asleep. Away off in the distance I can see old DeWay in his glass cage. He's a short little bird, built like a boxcar. Short as he is, he has shoulders on him a yard wide. And his head is square, like a box. But don't you think I'm calling him a squarehead. Nix! His mouth is sewed up, like a slit in a chunk of oak timber. Once in a while he grins, and then you can see he's minus most of his teeth. He come over once or twice to talk to the man at the desk next to mine, and I see that he opens that mouth of his just enough to let the words get out. It aint much better than a whisper. And most of the time he's talking he looks off in another direction, and you might think he's talking to himself. But he aint—not by a long shot!

McClippey, the assistant manager, is a little short fellow, too. Only where DeWay is chunky, McClippey is not much thicker than a lead-pencil. DeWay's eyes are all squinted up, so's you can hardly

see them, but McClippey has bright little eyes, like a mouse. He holds his head on one side, too, like a mouse. Every once in a while I can see him get up and come to the door of his glass cage and stand there, peeking out, with his head on one side and his eyes darting around the room, and his little gray mustache quivering, just like a mouse. And then he darts into DeWay's office with a funny little run.

I do nothing, all this first week, leastways nothing you might call more'n keeping awake. Then DeWay sends an office-boy over to my desk and calls me into his office.

McClippey is the one that took me on, so I've never talked to DeWay before this.

DeWay don't ask me to sit down. He don't even look up at me when I come in. He sits there looking over some papers and I stand there like a dummy, waiting. I can see that what he is looking at is my application for a job. Finally he says, whisperin' out of the corner of his face:

"So you was a newspaper reporter before you come here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ever work on any murder mysteries?"

"Some," I tells him. I could've told him a-plenty, but I kind of thought he didn't want to listen.

He hands me a folder, without so much as looking up. "Work on this," he whispers, like it hurt him to open his mouth. "Find him. Don't take his money. He's a crook. Take the car."

He said something else, too, but he said it with his face in a pile of papers he had pulled over to him, and I couldn't hear what it was. And I didn't dare ask.

I took the folder back to my desk and studied over it. Some fellow name of Strieben had bought a car from a dealer uptown. I was in the middle of the reports—they was a whole bundle of them in the folder—when I heard a little rustle and a sort of squeak beside my desk and there was McClippey. He looks at me with his head on one side.

"Very interesting case, that Strieben case," he says, his mustache twitching.

"Yeah?" I says.

"Mr. DeWay is quite upset about it, quite," he says. "I suggest, young man, that you do your best. I may say I advise you to—in fact, I warn you to. I might go even further! If you don't succeed within ten days, I suggest that you don't come back at all, my boy. As a matter of fact, I warn you not to."

"Yeah?" I says. "It aint a tough one, is it?"

"This is the eighth of September," he says. "On the eighteenth of September you are either with this department—or you aint," he says.

Then he whisks off to his glass cage and disappears.

THE fellow at the desk next to mine leans over. "What have they give you, buddy?" he says. I show him the folder. He whistles. Then he shakes hands with me. "Glad to've known you," he says. "Come in and see us once in a while, after you leave us," he says.

Then he gets up and drifts around from desk to desk, tipping everybody off. They all come over and gather around me. "The Strieben case," they say over their shoulder, every time some new bird edges in to see what the convention is about. "The Strieben case! Oh, boy!"

I sit there and get red as a beet. They're having a swell time, kidding me. I would 'a' taken a poke at them, only there was too many of them.

Well, it turns out this is the worst lemon in the office. Sour—essence of citric acid! Everybody has had a crack at it. Enough teeth has been set on edge, in this here case, to paper a dental college. They all pat me on the back, pitying. And they give me the low-down on it—such as it is.

It seems this Strieben flimflammed a dealer into giving him a new Monarch sedan near a year ago. Then he moves out of the neighborhood. Disappears. There aint a sign of him, anywheres. Everybody has worked on it—credit men, and collectors, and field representatives, and practically everybody in the office except the elevator-man. Not a clue.

Pretty soon I get tired of listening to them. This aint getting me nowheres. So I put on the old lid, get my expense money from the cashier and kisses them all good-by. I was sick.

When I gets out on the street I was like to sit down on the curb and bawl. Ten days to find a guy that nobody can find! Suppose you *did* find him, that wouldn't be finding the car, and the car

was what I had to find. Twenty million cars in the country—and ten days to do it in. A fat chance!

"Well, Keogh," I says to myself, "this isn't getting you nowheres. The paper goes to press in ten days!"

So I drags over to the nearest bank and shoves a five into the window.

"Gimme a hundred nickels," I says.

The teller shoves them out. "You must be going to do a lot of telephoning," he says.

"I am," I says. "Going to tell some of my girls good-by."

"They'll miss you," he says.

"So will DeWay," I says. And I was on my way.

I made thirty-eight phone calls that day and when I fell out of the booth at six o'clock I couldn't use my legs. They was paralyzed. All I had, out of the thirty-eight calls, was thirty-eight goose-eggs. I never heard *"No"* in so many different female voices before.

First thing in the morning, I called up McClippey. "This is Joe Keogh," I says. "Have you got the car?" he says. "No," I says. "You've got nine days," he says, and hangs up on me.

From nine-fifteen to four-thirty in the afternoon, I made forty-three phone calls. At two o'clock in the afternoon the pay-station operator took the jiggers out of her hair and come over and looked into the booth. "Would you like your lunch brought in there?" she says. "No," I says, wiping the sweat out of my eyes, "I brought a ham sandwich in with me. You couldn't spare me a Turkish towel, could you?"

"No," she says. "The company don't provide them."

"Back to your post, then, girlie," I says. "I've got another number to try."

"There's only a few left in the book," she says. "Don't any of 'em suit you?"

"No," I says, "but I'm getting warmer."

WELL, six more female voices tells me *"No"* in six more different keys, and then I swoons away in the booth. But I had my mother's name and address sewed in the pocket of my coat, so they sent me there. A hot bath, a cold shower, a light supper of ham-and-eggs, fried potatoes, two sirloin steaks, baked potatoes, cabbage, apple pie, and nine hours of sleep puts me on my feet again. At nine o'clock next morning I phones the office.

"Have you got the car?" says McClippey. "No," I says. "Eight days," he says. And I got nothin' out of jiggling the hook.

The girl at the pay-station was right glad to see me. "This is fine," she says. "The board of directors called up this morning to ask how you was. The company's declaring an extra dividend. Have you tried the 'Too Late to Classify' numbers yet?"

"No," I says, "but I may. I've got thirteen nickels to go. I'll play this one."

And I give her another number. "No," says the female voice at the other end of the line, after I ask her the usual question.

"Shoot a nickel on this," I says to the operator, tossin' my eighty-ninth nickel on the counter.

"Why, yes," says the last female voice I get on the wire. "Grade B."

"Grade B!" I yells, socking the receiver back on the hook, and bursting out of the booth. "Taxi!"

"Who would have thought it!" says the operator, patting her hair coyly.

"So long, little one," I says, thrustin' the remainin' eleven nickels on her. "See you New Year's Eve!"

It was only ten o'clock in the morning. By eleven o'clock I was walking up the steps of an apartment house three miles away from the one where Strieben used to live when he gypped the dealer out of that Monarch sedan.

In the front hall there is brass mail-boxes, rows of 'em, sunk into the marble on each side. I take a slant at the names: "Messmer. Lifsky. Schloss. Flynn. Cracow. Dornauben. Strieben."

Strieben!

Through the glass door I could see a woman on her hands and knees in the hallway, scrubbin' the floor with soap and water. I was just on the point of pushing the Striebens' bell-button when I had another hunch. I waited till the woman had worked around till she was facin' me, as you might say, and then I rapped on the glass.

"Mr. Strieben live here?" I says.

"No," she says.

"Aint this his name on the letter-box?" I says, pointing to it.

"You should call me a liar, huh?" she yells, heaving up on her feet, and she sticks the mop in the bucket of muddy water and sloshes it around, mad.



At two o'clock the operator come over to the booth. "Would you like your lunch brought in there?" she says.

"Get out!" she says, threatening-like.

So I goes down to the corner and buys me a package of cigarettes.

"Know anybody named Strieben around in this neighborhood?" I says to the fellow back of the counter.

"No," he says, right away. That was funny, you know—because most people, when you ask them a question like that, they repeat the name over after you, if they're really tryin' to place the name. "Strieben—Strieben," they'll say. "Sure you don't mean Stevens? They's a family named Stevens down the street here." That's what they always do. But this bird, this cigar-salesman, was too positive to suit me. "No," he says, without even stopping to think. Sounded funny, somehow.

"Well, I wish I could find him," I says. "I heard he lived on this street, Number 337 West." The right number was 387, but I thought I'd find out what I could, first. "I heard he wants to buy a car," I adds.

"He's got one," says this dummy. Then he turns red. "I mean, *I've* got one. You couldn't sell me another, buddy. You'd be wastin' your time."

"Oh," I says, "that's too bad. Maybe some other time."

And I goes out, pretending I hadn't noticed his slip-up. Something queer, here! Then I makes the rounds of all the garages in the neighborhood. It takes me all afternoon. Eight of 'em, altogether, I goes to. I wear out my best pair of shoes, and that's all it gets me. I wander around in every one of 'em, keepin' my eye open for a Monarch sedan. I see some Monarchs, too, but none of 'em have the right serial number. If any garage man stops me, to ask what the hell I was looking for, I'd tell him I was thinkin' of buying a second-hand Monarch. "Well, that one aint for sale," he say. "That belongs to So-and-So." Then I'd ask him if a fellow named Strieben kept his car in there. They never heard of him.

By this time it was near five o'clock, and I was all in. I gets the office on the phone, just before closing time.

"Have you got the car?" says McClippey. I was just about to tell him I was closin' in on it. I says, "No, but—"

That's as far as I got. "Seven more days," he says, and hung up.

I drag my old worn-out dogs back along the street, walking on the opposite side of the street from the apartment house where the Striebens hole in. I'm worried, yet I'm not worried, both. I've found the guy's address, all right, after

everybody else in the office has fallen down on it. It's taken me only three days, and seven days is a good long time to go. But I aint got the car yet. Got it? I aint even located it! So I'm working the old bean for all it's worth, hoofing along the sidewalk. And I can't dig up a hunch to save me. I was sort of worried, at that.

It was a good thing I didn't ring that doorbell, when I was so close to doing it. It wouldn't do no good to walk in and *ask* 'em where the car is. Not on your life! They would just lie to you, and you'd be tipping them off and giving them a chance to fade away again. No, the thing to do is to find the car first, without lettin' them have any warning. Yeah, but *how?*

Believe me, it had me buffaloed.

IN the middle of the block, right opposite the apartment house, I see a delicatessen store and I goes in to buy me a couple of sandwiches for supper and a glass of milk. I'm standing there, weak on my legs, gargling this stuff down, for maybe ten minutes. And in this ten minutes no less than four women come into the store. Old White-apron waits on them, one by one, and by the time they're gone, three or four more come in. He sure is busy. I spear me a couple of sinkers and crack another bottle of milk, and kill time. Finally the store is empty for a minute and he wipes his face.

"Keep you runnin', don't they?" I says, paying my check.

"Oh, yeah," he says. "It aint so bad."

"Pretty soft, I calls it," I says. "All cash and carry."

"You said it," he says. "I ran a charge account grocery, once. Never again! They like to ruined me."

I goes out. No use asking *him* about the Striebens, I figure. I'm laying money that they do their trading with some store where they can run a charge account. The folder shows that they skipped out of the neighborhood where they lived before, leaving all sorts of stores feeling sick. It's a bet that they're fixing to do the same thing here when they get ready to fade.

Well, I haven't got an idea on earth. So after wanderin' around aimless for an hour I goes home and calls it a day. And I aint happy.

Wouldn't it make you sore? Here I am, right on the bird's doorstep, and I don't know what he looks like, even, nor what his missus looks like. I wouldn't know 'em if I ran into them on the street!

The next morning, I woke up desperate. "Here, Keogh, you've got to do something definite," I says. "Deadline!" It's a Saturday, and a short day.

So I breeze up to the drug-store at the corner where the Strieben flat is. I buy me a pack of cigarettes and then I ask the clerk. I come right out flat-footed. "Say, I'm looking for a bird named Strieben," I says. "They tell me he lives somewheres around here. You don't know him, do you?"

The clerk gives me a sour look. "Yeah, I know him," he says.

"Yeah?" I says. "Know where he lives?"

"He aint home," says the clerk. "He's out of town."

"Reckon he'll be home tomorrow?" I says. "Tomorrow is Sunday. He might be home Sunday, huh?"

"Naw," says the guy. "He wont be home."

"Well, what's the number?" I says. "I might go around there."

"No," he says, "*you* don't want his number. Forget it."

"Say!" I says, "what's eatin' you? Come on, loosen up, buddy, have a heart. I gotta see him on business."

"Yeah," he says, "that's what they all say. Nothin' doin'. Leave your name and address, if you want to, and if I ever see him I'll give it to him."

"Aw, come on," I says. "Be a good fellow."

"Say, *I* don't know you!" he says, gettin' sore. "I'm tellin' you to lay off it! Want to get your face pushed in?"

"Yeah?" I says, gettin' hot. "Who's goin' to do it?"

"It aint me," he says. "I'm just tellin' yuh. Lay off!"

I look at him a moment, and I see he's scared. He wouldn't fight anybody. He's backing away.

"Oh," I says, "so it's Strieben that's going to do it, huh? Bad actor, is he?"

"That's all right," he says, still backing away. "You leave your name and address."

"George Washington," I says. "Address the White House. That'll get me." And I walks out.



"Aint this his name on the letter-box?" I says. "You should call me a liar, huh?" she yells, and she sticks the mop in the bucket of muddy water. "Get out!"

Walkin' along, I got to thinkin'. Maybe it wouldn't be a bad idea, if this bird Strieben is so tough as the drug clerk seems to think, if I was to breeze down to the nearest station-house and give the cops a rumble. Maybe they've got something on him.

I know a good many cops around town, but this particular Loot is a new one on me. I never see him before. He's got somebody in his room with him, so I have to wait about an hour before I get in.

"I'm trying to locate a man named Strieben, Lieutenant," I says. "They tell me he moved up this way a couple of months ago. Know where I can find him?"

The Loot grins. "Sorry I can't help you, son," he says. "The only Strieben in this district has been livin' here ever since I remember. He never lived nowheres else."

"What's his street number?" I says. "Maybe he knows the fellow I want."

"Look it up in the directory!" he says. "What do you think this is, young fellow, a information bureau?"

"Much obliged, Lieutenant," I says. I was glad to get out. I was sure beginning to get worried. I hoof it back up the street and try to dope it out. Who *is* this fellow Strieben? How come he's got *everybody* fixed? The scrub-lady at his flat is cagey. Little Stupid at the cigar-store is cagey. The drug-store guy is cagey and lets on that Strieben is a bad boy to fool with. And the police is shielding him. I couldn't figure it.

It's near noon, by this time, and I drift back to the delicatessen store for a bite of lunch. But first I calls up the office. "He's gone for the day, Mr. Keogh," says McClippey's stenographer. "But he left word that if you called up, I was to tell you there's six days left."

"Much obliged!" I says. But I was so sore I could've lammed anybody. Six days! And one of 'em a Sunday!

THE delicatessen-store man was busier than ever. He hardly had time to give me what I ask for. Women was coming in every minute.

"Well, you get a rest tomorrow, anyways," I says to him once.

"The heck I do!" he says, moppin' off the sweat. "Ever hear of a delicatessen store closin' down on Sundays? Sunday is my worst day!"

Pretty soon a dame comes in and starts ordering the usual line of stuff. I give her the once-over. She sure is one hard-boiled jane—a big bottle-blonde, bright yellow hair, face painted up like a house, high-heel slippers, and diamond earrings that must've made her ears sag. And a flock of rings that would knock your eye out. Boy, she was *hard;* I'm telling you!

After she goes, old White-apron comes over to chin again.

"Well, *her* old man wont be home to-morrow," he says.

"How come?" I says.

"She ordered chicken salad," he says.

"Yeah?" I says.

"Never knew it to fail," he says. "Guess the old man likes his steaks. Leastways, when he's home, she never buys nothin' here."

"Some dame!" I says. "Where does she live?"

The delicatessen man grins. "Right across the street," he says, "but don't start nothin'. No, sir! The last guy that tried it aint out of the hospital *yet!*"

"Land on him, did she?" I says.

"Not her," he says, "but her old man. Boy, when he got home she must've told him this fellow had tried to get fresh, and he starts right out lookin' for him. Say, he's *bad!* He'd 'a' killed the fellow, if it hadn't been for the cop. No, sir, you don't want none of *that*, kid!"

"Not me," I says. "She don't mean nothin' to *me*. But her old man must be makin' a pile of jack, to doll her up in that glassware. Travelin' salesman?"

"I'll say he's a salesman!" says my friend. "Only he don't sell it by the case —car lots, that's him." Another woman come in. "Yes, lady?" he says.

When I gets outside, I has to lean up against a wall. "Keogh, you got him!" I says to myself. But then I has another think. *Have* I got him? Well, no! Not so's you'd notice it! All I've done is to find out his business and that explains why he stands in like he does, in the neighborhood. He slips the janitor-lady a two-spot once in a while, so's she will bark at folks. He slips the cigar-store boy a bottle every so often. Like as not, the drug-store is peddling his stuff on the side. And the Lieutenant—well, you can figure he's getting his, all right!

Yeah, that explains a lot—but it don't explain how Joe Keogh is going to get that car without getting a poke in the nose. Fine! "A very interestin' case," as old McClippey had said.

And I haven't laid an eye on the car, and I don't really know whether Strieben has it or not. And him out of town, and nobody knows where! Canada, prob'ly. And me with six days to go!

SUNDAY morning, early, I hotfoots it up to my friend the delicatessen man. He's got on a new white apron and is getting set for a big day. "Listen," I says, "tell me something. How much truck does that blonde dame, the one I saw yesterday, buy off'm you every day?"

He shakes his head. "Lay off'm it, I told you," he says. "Aint I warnin' you?"

"You've got me wrong," I says. "I don't care if I never lay an eye on her again. But she's in here every day, aint she?"

"Ye-e-a-ah," he says, very reluctant.

"Well, I'm going to trade with you," I says. "The woman that runs the place where I board took sick last night. I got to get my own meals till she gets over it. And I'm going to eat 'em at home. Now, listen—I aint got time to order the stuff over the phone. When I blow in here at night, I'd like to have it all ready and waiting for me. And I don't want to pick the stuff out—you do it for me. Now get me—everything that blonde dame orders, *I* want to order. You lay it out the same time you lay out hers. Get me?"

"You're cuckoo," he says.

"Don't you want my money?" I says.

"Oh, all right," he says. "All right. But I'm telling you she eats hearty."

"Food is my only vice," I says. "Let's go!"

I was there before five o'clock Monday afternoon. "Three dollars and eighty cents," says the delicatessen man. "It's yours," I says, paying him and staggerin' out with the load. I dodge the drug-store and the cigar-store and go to a telephone around the corner, and there I look over the cash slip to see what I've got.

He's give me Saratoga chips, mayonnaise, Liberty cabbage, salami, a bottle of queen olives, cream cheese and chicken salad.

I get the office on the phone. "Have you got the car?" says McClippey.

"No," I says.

"Four days," he says.

I was a fool to've called him up.

I takes the delicatessen junk home and eats it.

Tuesday afternoon, two dollars and sixty cents it costs me. Dill pickles, caviar, brandied apricots in glass—and chicken salad! But I eat what I pay for. Three days left.

Wednesday it was liverwurst, Camembert cheese, Saratoga chips—and chicken salad. I couldn't get away with all of it. Two days left! No Strieben.



"Shut up!" says the cop. "The three of yuh is under arrest, for disturbin' the peace! Stay here while I call the wagon!"

Thursday, and the dame must've figured she'd give herself a treat. When I gets the load home and opens it, I like to've walked out on it. Frankfurters, figs in honey, *antipasto*, charlotte russe, and chicken salad! And it was one of those hot days when the ice had give out and the butter was nothin' but yellow oil.

But I eat as much as I can of it.

I WAS sort of pale, all the next day. When I totters up to the delicatessen store, I has to walk past it, twice, before I can get up my nerve to go in. If I have to eat chicken salad and all that junk once more, I'm through! *Two* ways—if Strieben hasn't got back, my job is gone; and if I have to look at chicken salad one more time—well, know what I mean?

So I stagger in and just look at the bird. "She aint been in today," he says.

Well, I totters down to the corner and sits down on the curb. It's just five o'clock in the afternoon. Is the tenth day gone? If it is, I'm licked!

I never was so blue in my life.

"Never give up, Keogh," I says to myself then. "Twenty-three is your age, it aint your number. You're tall, redheaded, blue-eyed, and your pants fit. All you need is brains. Yeah, brains! Try and find 'em. You used to have 'em in the newspaper game—has they dried up on you? The old newspaper methods is all right—aint they worked in this here Strieben case, so far? Do we go to press, or don't we, Keogh?"

And just then I see the blonde dame with the ten-ton direct-lighting jewelry go floatin' down the street and ease herself into the meat-market. I'm over there too, in one hop.

I horn in alongside of her just in time to hear her give her order. "I want a four-pound cut of sirloin," she says, "and cut it three inches thick."

And with that I know that Strieben is my meat! He'll be home that night!

I buy ten cents' worth of sliced ham just to cover up, and slide out again. I eat supper at the delicatessen—because it's right across the street from the apartment house.

Well, old White-apron is a friend of mine by this time—I've spent eleven dollars and thirty cents in his place, up to date—so he don't mind if I hang out in front of the place all night. Believe me,

it seems like all night, to *me*. I'm there at eleven o'clock when he's closing down for the night, and still no sign of Strieben's car. Five hours I've been standing there!

"Better be on your way, kid," he says. "There's a cop comes on beat here around eleven, and he's liable to tell you to be on your way."

"It's all right with *me*," I says, tellin' him good-night, "a cop would look awful good."

So I stands there alone in the dark. Take it from me, I don't know whether it's the four days of funny food or what I've heard about Strieben's tough little ways that makes me feel woozy—but I was scared, I'm tellin' you!

"Deadline!" I keeps tellin' myself.

And close on to midnight, just when I'm beginning to think I'll be pinched if I hang around there much longer, a Monarch sedan drives up in front of the apartment and two men get out and go into the house!

I give 'em time to get the elevator, and then I slide over and make a jump to look at the serial number. It's Strieben's car. I'm tremblin' all over, see? And as quick as I can, I lift out the distributor head and the brush, and hide 'em back of a fire-plug, in the dark. *Now* let him move that car, if he can!

But just as I start away, here come Strieben and his boy friend, also the chicken-salad dame and another jazz-baby. They let out a yell and start after me, and I turns around.

"What the hell do you think you're doin'?" says Strieben. He's got the hardest-lookin' map you ever was lucky enough not to see.

"I'm from the Wheelbase Finance Company," I says, "and you aint paid for this car and we're takin' it away from you," I says.

"You are like hell!" says Strieben, and he swings on me. Well, I just duck it, and then they all mix in, the women yellin' like cats, and me with all of 'em on my neck. The cop come runnin' up just in time, and he hauls 'em off'm me, but I can feel a nice shiner closin' up one eye, and one sleeve is tore out of my best coat.

"What's all this?" says the cop. And I tells him I'm goin' for somebody to haul the car away.

"Where's your replevin papers?" yells Strieben's friend. "Officer, I'm a lawyer and I tell you he can't take that car without papers!"

"Is that *so*?" I says. "Read your contract! We can take immediate possession without demand!"

"Don't let him kid you, Officer!" yells the lawyer. "He can't do it!"

"Shut up!" says the cop. "The three of yuh is under arrest, for disturbin' the peace! Stay here, while I call the wagon!"

Well, I goes down to the corner callbox with him, tryin' to argue with him all the way, but he wont listen to me. "Tell it to the Sergeant," he says.

I took a look over my shoulder and see the chicken-salad dame beatin' it back into the house. "Stop her!" I says to the cop, "she's going to telephone somebody!"

"Leave her do it," says the cop. "They can *all* ride in the wagon!"

Sure enough, when we get back after he's put in a call for the wagon, here come a wrecking-truck tearin' around the corner and up to the car. And this sap of a cop lets 'em put a tow-rope onto the Monarch and haul her off! I was near cryin'. The best I can do is to get the name of the wreckin' company, and the address, before the wagon comes up and we all have to pile in.

WELL, the Sarge lets us go, but he sides with the lawyer and tells me I can't take the car without a replevin. And I can't get a replevin till next day, and next day is too late! On top of that, Strieben says he wants me pinched again, for swipin' the distributor out of the car. The Sarge was ready to, at that, and the only way I get out is to tell 'em where it's hid. Strieben goes out, givin' me a dirty look.

I was licked; but I aint quittin'. I beat it up to the wreckin' garage. The car aint there, and, what's more, Strieben must've slipped the night man a ten-spot, for he wont tell me where it is. The most I can get out of him is the name of the man that owns the garage.

So I call up this bird on the phone and get him out of bed. By this time, it's two o'clock in the morning. Believe me, he's sore as they make 'em, until he finally makes out whose car it is that I'm tryin' to get. "Strieben?" he says. "Say, I've got a bum check from that bird right

now!" he says. And he calls his man to the phone and tells him to tell me where the car has been taken. "I'll be right down!" he says. "I'm goin' to get that crook!"

So I beats it over to the other garage, and it's two miles away and not a taxi in sight. The sedan is there, all right, though. And I leaps on it and hugs it.

And just then in come Strieben, carryin' the distributor in his mitt, all set to put it back and drive the car off!

But he aint seen me. I jump for the car, jerk up the hood, grab a pair of wire-cutters out of my pocket and go to it. The spark-plug wires must've thought they was hit by a lawn-mower. In two seconds flat I has them out, and I throw them down the waste drain in the floor. And with that I'm out of the back door before Strieben even knows I'm there.

Out in the alley, hidin' behind a ash barrel, I can hear him cussin' for an hour by the clock, while the night man tells him there just aint nothin' to be done about it. "There aint, aint there?" he says finally. "I'll show yuh! Get a tow-rope!"

Up to now I've been snickerin' to hear him carry on; but when he gets *that* idea, the laugh dies out on me like I been hit by a truck. "Oh, baby!" I groan. "He's goin' to lick me yet!"

But I tiptoes out of the alley and then runs three blocks, lookin' for a taxi. And then here's a taxi, parked up along the curb. The driver is asleep in the seat. I shake him loose. "Come on!" I says. "What's the big idea?" says the driver, cross. "I'll tell you as we go along!" I says. "Step on her!"

So I gives him the low-down on it, and he's a good guy and says he'll stick with me. And we get back in time to see Strieben turn the corner in a car he's hired, towing the sedan.

"Hang to him!" I whispers. And we do.

I aint got an idea what I'm goin' to do, but I'm mad all the way through, and I'd 'a' stuck to him to San Francisco, if he'd gone there. But I couldn't get replevin papers, and he is too tough a bird for me to catch up with him and mix it. He aint goin' to get out of my sight, take it from me; but all I can do is to hang onto him and pray for luck.

And at four o'clock in the mornin' his tow-rope breaks.

We slide around a corner just as he gets out and starts to fix it. And by the time we get around the block he's got it tied together and has started off again.

We trail him another ten blocks; his tow-rope breaks again.

This time he thinks he's safe out of the district, and he figures that he can take time to go get him a tow-rope that wont break. And he drives off, leavin' the Monarch right there.

"Get out your tow-rope!" I whispers to the taxi-driver.

"What d'you think I am, a wreckin' crew?" he says. "*I* aint got no tow-rope!"

"Well, you got tire-chains, aint you?" I says. I was thinkin' fast, believe me!

So we hitch the chains together and onto the Monarch and we yank that five thousand dollars' worth of sedan five miles across town, to where the dealer that sold the car to Strieben is livin'. And I get him out of bed and he signs the receipt!

IT'S half-past five in the mornin' and just gettin' daylight. I'm afraid to go to bed, so I goes straight to the office. When McClippey gets there at nine o'clock, I'm asleep on his doormat.

"Get up," he says, pushin' me with his foot. "You're fired!"

"Fine," I says, handin' him the receipt. "Here's your car."

"How the hell did you do it?" squeaks McClippey.

"The folder said Strieben had a couple of kids," I says. "You can't hide kids, leastways not in *this* town. They's only a couple of hundred public schools in the phone book—they got to go to one of 'em."

"You're hired," says McClippey. "Get your report in right away."

"Fine!" I says. "I'll write it this mornin'."

"You'll write nothin'!" he says. "Give it to a stenographer. We're payin' for brains, not for fingers. Make it snappy —I got another job for you. And *this* time it aint goin' to be so easy!"

I take my girl out to dinner that night, to celebrate.

"What'll it be, kid?" I says, handin' her the menu.

"Oh," she says, "all I want is some chicken salad."

Right then is where we has our first misunderstandin'.

The *FOREST LEGION*



By
ARTHUR HAWTHORNE CARHART

A fascinating story of stirring events in present-day Colorado, by an author who knows a lot about trees and men and the art of writing a lively story.

Illustrated by Paul Lehman

The Story So Far:

WAR had been declared—between Bradley Ogden, supervisor of the Pinos Altos National Forest, and the old-guard ranchmen who were bitterly fighting the necessary restrictions placed upon their grazing privileges by the Forest Service. The first shot was fired from ambush—as Ogden was talking with Ranger Tillamook Thompson and the girl who was his clerk, Ted Hathaway. The bullet missed him but killed his favorite horse Silver; and he knew that at the meeting of the cattlemen's association called for the next evening hostilities would be resumed. He was quite correct in this, and gun-play was about to follow the rough-and-tumble effort of the tougher element—Jasper Banks and his two sons, Lucius Moon and others—to "get" the supervisor, when the lamp was knocked over. Afterward older and cooler heads prevailed, but Ogden knew they were now planning some other and more effective attack.

And there were complications to his problem: Caverley, his bureaucratic superior, was inclined to give in to the encroaching ranchmen; and he was worried over two other matters: over the possibility of trouble caused by his entrusting a look-out station to Della Gordon, daughter of one of the ranchmen who opposed him; and over the interest shown in Hurley Moon by Ted Hathaway, whom Brad more than liked, though he treated her on a man-to-man basis, and knew that Hurley, like many of the younger generation, was his friend and on his side in this fight. (*The story continues in detail:*)

THE one street of Leetsdale seethed with mild excitement.

Men on sweat-flecked horses whose flanks showed creamy lather rode the streets. Cow-men in riding-boots, chaps, gaudy shirts and high hats milled near the pool-hall and stores or stood in groups talking. Women riders in flaring old-fashioned split skirts of leather, or in trim whipcord breeches and shining riding-boots, in shirts or shirt-waists and in all styles of range hats, were sprinkled through the crowd. Girls in white frocks, gay ribbons and braided hair, older women in somber skirts and mail-order blouses, were everywhere.

Dogs scurried or stood wagging expressive tails. The chickens that usually ranged undisturbed in the street were having a sorry time. Squawking flivvers rattled and chugged their way through the jam. A few larger cars, driven by city folks, purred in their wake. Small boys clutching half-spent bunches of red fire-



Ogden was down, Flashlight squealing in hatred. . . . . Something big, powerful, bolted through the dust; the s h o u l d e r of Moon's g r a y caught the man-killer.

crackers and bits of glowing punk filtered through the turmoil and added their full quota to the din that hung like a mantle of mixed sound over the village. Fine dust stirred up by hoofs and tires made the bright sunlight hazy.

Leetsdale and the Fourth of July meant *rodeo* to the Cañon Creek Section. All Cañon Creekers and many others from farther away had congregated to celebrate and find out who could sit the upper deck of a plunging bronc' with the greatest skill and elegance.

It was going to be a top-notch celebration. Indications positively pointed that way by eleven o'clock. One of these was that Charley Leatherby was already so drunk that he was standing on the porch of the hotel and singing one hymn tune after another while a gaping flock of children formed anew with each outburst of the evangelical chorister.

INTO this happy ferment, at noon, came the Trail Blazer with Ted Hathaway at the wheel and Brad Ogden in the low seat by her side. Ted steered through the crowd, drove the car to the side of the road, stopped under the shade of big old cottonwoods whose feet were wet with the moisture from the roadside irrigation ditch. The man and girl got out and stretched themselves. Brad was in Forest Service uniform of green whipcord riding breeches and riding-boots. Ted was trim, slim and graceful in a new pair of cowboy boots, pearl-gray breeches, a silk shirt to match, and a vivid blue Windsor tie. She carried her broad-brimmed range hat in her hand as they strolled side by side along the sidewalk by the schoolhouse where Lucius Moon had stopped the rough-and-tumble fight. The crowd thickened as they reached the hotel and post office, and they were surrounded by laughing, milling holiday revelers.

At the front of the post office they met Hurley Moon. He had been talking to a group of cow-men from beyond the Lodgepole section. Brad nodded to them as Hurley broke away and came to where the two from the Forest office had stopped at the edge of the plank walk.

Hurley's white teeth glinted as he smiled in welcome.

"Thought it was just about time for you-

all to show up. Say, Tom Barney wants you, Brad."

"What about?"

"I think he—there he is now," broke off Hurley. "Hey, Tom, here's Brad Ogden."

Tom Barney, boss for many years of the arena of Leetsdale's annual Fourth of July rodeo, stopped and then came waddling toward them. Tom was short, round, a little bowlegged, and always wore range clothes.

"Howdy, lady," he said to Ted. Then turning to Brad: "I've been scoutin' fer you, Ogden, for nigh an hour. Heard you was goin' to be here. Hurley tol' me. Wont you do somethin' to help out this celebration?"

"Why, sure, if I can," replied Ogden.

"Well, I need some help in the arena," said Barney. "I had Charley Leatherby all fixed up to help. But some of the boys from Grape Creek Section has got Charley religious already, and he wouldn't know a calf-ropin' contest from a chuck-wagon race by two o'clock. I usually keep him guarded good until after the show, but he got away from me today. I'd like to have you fill in."

"Maybe I'd better find out what you want me to do," suggested Ogden, smiling.

"Charley was goin' to be one of the judges of the buckin' contests," said Barney. "We've got a long string of entries. You know somethin' about buckin' contests, don't you?"

"Oh, I know that part of the game, I guess," replied Ogden. "But I'm afraid there are some here that wouldn't be likely to agree with me whatever decision I make. You know some of the permittees on the Pinos Altos aren't too friendly with me, don't you, Barney?"

"Yeh—sure. But old Moon aint ridin', ner is Eli Gordon neither. Most of the rest I think might be willin' to take yer decisions without question. Fact, I think they all think you're shootin' square as you see the light. Square shootin' in a buckin' contest and enforcin' regulations on the Forest is two separate and distinct things, anyway. We need some disinterested outsider and you bein' a Gover'ment man gives us jest the sort of official standin' we need."

Ogden glanced at Ted. They had planned to go to the rodeo together.

"I think you ought to help Mr. Barney out," said Ted seriously in answer to the look. "Hurley will see that I'm not lonesome during the show, wont you, Hurley?"

Ogden glanced quickly at Hurley. He saw his friend's face light at the idea of being alone with Ted. Hurley and Ted, his two best friends, would be happier if he was not with them!

"I guess I might as well. I'm ready to do what I can, even if it's serving as judge at a buckin' match," he drawled, and then smiled, slowly, and a trifle wistfully. Ted Hathaway saw that little quirk to the corners of Ogden's mouth, understood.

"Fine business!" said Barney heartily. "I'll depend on you. I know I wont have to watch *you* from gettin' wall-eyed and start singin' before the show! See you there at two."

As the arena director strode away, rolling on his stout legs, Ted put her hand up impulsively to grip Ogden's arm.

"We didn't want to get rid of you, Brad; don't think that," she said softly. Hurley looked quickly at her, then at his friend. Brad watched the crowd in the street. "I just thought it might be a chance to make friends here."

"Yeh, that's right," replied Ogden. "I think you had the right idea, Ted. After the show maybe we can bum around some together, us three. Anyway, the most important thing right now is food. Where's the best eatin', Hurley?"

"I think the ladies of the church are servin' some chicken down in the yard at the Teller place. I don't know of any better chance. Let's have a crack at it."

Dodging trotting horses, getting out of the way of autos, bombarded at one point by a troop of young imps with firecrackers, they found their way to where the high old native cottonwoods and willows threw cool shade over the long plank table that had been nailed together in the Teller yard.

CHAPTER X

THE little grandstand with its plank seats and wooden canopy had started to fill when Ogden, Hurley and Ted reached the rodeo grounds.

"*Adios.* See you later," said Ogden as he turned to hurry away across the hundred yards of open space between the grandstand and the improvised chutes, beyond which milling bronc's were corraled.

He passed the chutes and climbed the pole corral.

As he sat on the top stick of the aspen pole fence, Tom Barney came waddling up on his short legs.

"Fine business, fine business!" he snorted as he pulled his weight up beside Ogden. "Right on the job, I see. Well, we've got a right smart little show ahead. We'll have to start on time, or we'll conflict with the dance tonight. Aint seen nothin' of old man Moon, hev you?"

"Nope. Why?" asked Ogden.

"He's goin' to ride as pick-up man in the buckin'. He's a crackin' rider, the old man is—equal to his son; and that's sayin' somethin'."

"Who's the other judge?" asked Ogden.

"Why, he's some fellow named Tadlock that has rode some in arena shows up north a ways. Visitin' his sister over Cañon way. I just happened to hear 'bout him and phoned him t'other day. He said he'd be glad to act. Guess from all I hear he knows his hackamores."

"If you mean Tim Tadlock of Dubois, Wyoming, then I'll say he knows his hackamores and his surcingles too. That the fellow you have on with us this afternoon?"

"I guess— Well, I kain't say for sure, maybe. There he comes now. —Hey, Tadlock! Come on over and meet the rest of our judge committee."

Short, stocky, dressed in a business suit, but with wide range hat, loud shirt and a neckerchief around his neck, and wearing riding-boots, Tim Tadlock came striding with his short stout bow-legs in the walk of a man who has lived much in the saddle.

"This is Mr. Ogden, the Forest Supervisor," said Tom Barney. "Ogden, this is Tim Tadlock from up north way some'res."

"Hello, Tim," greeted Ogden, jumping down from the top of the corral. "You old rascal, I thought they'd buried you long months past."

"Brad, you old squaw!" rumbled Tim Tadlock as his hairy brown paw closed over Ogden's. "You old son of a gun, I aint heered nothin' of you since the last time we rid against each other up at Lander one Fourth of July about three years ago. How they treatin' you?"

"So-so."

"Oh, you knowed each other afore, eh?" said Tom Barney, climbing down. "Up north?"

"Yeh," said Tom Tadlock.

"Well, let's get things strung out and ready for the show," suggested Tom, walking toward the end of the chutes where riders were already gathering.

"Yo're workin' with 'em down here like you was up Dubois way, Brad?"

"No, not so you could notice it, Tim! Hard row to buck here. Lots of antagonism."

"Hell-yuh-say!" exploded Tim. "They buckin' the Service?"

"Buckin' everything, me in particular," replied Brad.

IN the arena things now got moving. A calf-roping contest with a few entrants was pushed from the slate in quick time. One of Eli Gordon's hands took first money with a man from beyond the high range second. Steer-roping came next. It was tame enough, except for the notion of one lanky long-horned renegade steer that decided to charge the crowd around the chutes. The onlookers scattered like a shattered rainbow of yellows, greens, blues, pinks and flame, as neckerchiefs and shirts flapped in the quick breeze of the retreat. A grinning cowhand with an accurate rope persuaded the balky steer to go back to the yards, and shortly afterward there came the pause before the big show of the afternoon, the bucking contest.

Tim Tadlock came sidling over to Ogden, who had been standing near the chutes, and motioned him to one side.

"Did Tom Barney tell you what he had up his sleeve for these ridin' *hombres?*" he inquired. "The surprise he's got?"

Brad shook his head.

"Well, them's just ordinary range horses that he's got mostly. But they's a couple of really bad renegades in that bunch there. Couple of real bad bronc's."

"Not local horses?" inquired Ogden.

"I should snicker not," replied Tim, his eyes twinkling. "One of them hosses is named Whirligig, and t'other's named Flashlight. Ever heered of 'em afore?"

"Gosh, yes! You mean the ones they've had at Cheyenne and Monte?"

"Them same," said Tim solemnly. "Them very same." And then Tim grinned, mischievously. "None around here air supposed to know, but they's here none the less."

"How did Tom get those two bad ones?"

"Well, I knowed they was in a bunch of bad hosses that a fellow over beyond Grape Creek is keepin' for one of the boys up in Wyoming. I tipped Tom Barney off when he was talkin' to me over the phone t'other day, and he went out and corraled them for the finals. Not so bad, eh?"

"Not dusty at all," agreed Ogden.

"All right, let's get this goin'," puffed Tom Barney as he came up to the chutes, to the little crowd of riders and helpers.

THE first man drawn was a youngster from beyond Grape Creek county. The horse he rode was a slim, hungry-looking black with an eye that showed white. The black was quiet in the chute as the saddle went on. He grunted as the cinches tightened. He hunched down as he felt the man's weight in the saddle.

His fine legs, quivering, tense, ready for the spring, were bunched under him. He had been in rodeo arena-chutes before.

The barricade fell. Out leaped a black thunderbolt with a wiry man riding the leather seat strapped to the thunderbolt. Dust fogged up; the horse leaped in the center of a cloud of it. The cow-waddy was having all he could do to keep his seat.

Toward the spectators, over the open space, first head-on toward the stand, then parallel to it, the horse fought. Legs stiff, springing, stiff—then turning and jumping, head down, pawing, he went—with the man rocking uncertainly in the seat.

There was a sudden twist, a quick turn. Then the horse ran unmounted down the field. The man rolled in front of the grandstand. He got up, brushed himself and trotted back toward the chutes with a sheepish grin. The crowd hooted gleefully.

The next horse came trotting from the chute as if he was on show, pranced a few steps, saw the crowd, shied, started humping himself on stiff legs, jumping up and down almost in one spot. Seconds passed; the man weaved easily in the saddle. The whistle of the arena director closed the time for his riding. Lucius Moon, on a big mottled gray horse, came racing alongside and lifted the man from the saddle, away from the chance of being caught by flying hoofs if he should try to dismount.

"Well, that's two done for," commented Tim. "The best exhibit so far is that old codger there on that gray, the pick-up man. Who is he? Knows his business, I'd say."

"He's Lucius Moon, a rancher up in the Lodgepole and Keyhole section. He's the leader of the gang that's trying to make my life a trial."

"Is he? Well," drawled Tim, looking again at Moon, "he looks like some cantankerous old tiger."

"He's a ring-tailed terror in action," said Ogden, grinning grimly.

Another horse now came plunging out.

The rider began to sway as the big bay animal started jumping from one side to the other while he bucked up and down. Lurching, weaving, arm flailing, surrounded by dust-clouds steaming up from hammering hoofs, the man suddenly grasped the horn of the saddle as a vicious jump of the horse caught him off balance.

"Pulled leather," breathed Tim. "He had to. Well, that's three. He's out. Only one that really's qualified so far. And he didn't have a hard ride. Looks like there might not be any need for uncoverin' the tricks of Whirligig and old Flashlight, after all."

"Oh, there are some really good riders here, I think," said Brad.

Another horse came out of the chute, bucked a moment and then trotted away as gently as any children's pony. The rider guided the horse back to the point where Barney stood a little in front of Brad and stocky Tim Tadlock, and jumped off disgustedly.

"That was no test," fumed the contestant. "No test at all! Old plow-horse here. Give me a chance to ride, will you? I want a re-ride."

"You'll get it sooner or later," consoled Tom Barney. "Everyone will get a fair shake that rides his horse."

The rider stamped away, leading his dejected horse back toward the corral.

Ogden glanced toward the chute, saw a particularly colorful figure in flaring chaps and vivid cow-country haberdashery. It was Ken Banks.

Tim Tadlock noted the quick squinting of Ogden's eyes as they lit on the young rancher in all his glory, and looked up at his friend inquiringly.

"Who's that young squirt?" asked Tim in disgust. "I've seen him around here all the day, everywhere."

"What did you say, stranger?" cut in an angry, sharp voice. "Did I hear you right? Eh?"

Ogden and Tim whirled. Jap Banks, face dark, sharp chin shoved forward, was standing behind them.

Tim threw a quick glance at Ogden.

"Tim Tadlock, here, was askin' about a fellow he saw uptown awhile back," said Ogden quickly. "Some of the young kids all togged up, I guess, for the parade this morning."



Ken Banks had grabbed his gun and was beating the unoffending horse over the head with it!

"Well, that may be it," growled Jap Banks, eying both of them. "But I'm doubtful as hell."

"Well, I guess this time you're mistaken in your doubts, Banks," said Ogden. "Sorry we haven't time to cover this subject more thoroughly, but we're busy helping Tom Barney in his judging."

"You? You two?"

Ogden nodded.

"The hell! Where's Leatherby? He was to be one of the judges. There's something crooked— Hey, Tom! Tom Barney!" bawled Banks, shoving past Ogden and Tim. "What the hell's the idea here shiftin' judges on us? Where's Leatherby?"

Tom Barney turned angrily at first, then smirked a little as he approached Jap Banks in a conciliatory manner.

"I was caught in a jack-pot, Jap," he explained in a wheedling tone. "I had to get some one, and almost everyone else but Ogden here was in some contest. I found out he knows something about arena ridin', so I got him to sub for Leatherby."

"Where's Leatherby?" demanded Banks again.

"Why, the last time I seen him he was up on the back of the porch of the hotel with his nose pointin' up, sleepin' off a whalin' drunk."

"There's somethin' shifty about this," growled Banks. He turned on his heel and strode to where Ken and Jeff Banks were waiting for their turn to ride.

Jap Banks talked quickly, shortly to the two boys. In a moment Ken Banks came brushing by his father, scowling. He was followed a second later by his brother Jeff and his father. Ken came striding up to Tom Barney.

"Is that Ogden one of the judges on this buckin' contest?" he demanded.

Other waddies came flocking around. In a moment there was a tight little circle around the three Banks men—father and sons—and the judges.

"He shore is," replied Barney, tightening up a little from the first speech he had made to Jap Banks.

"How come?" demanded Ken.

"Leatherby's drunk."

"Did you have to take this Ogden?"

"Well, I did take him. What of it?" countered Tom Barney.

"Say, I've got a sweet chance of gettin' any fair shake with that *hombre* on the judges' stand," stormed Ken.

Stubby Tim Tadlock came stepping forward. He was quiet; he talked low.

"I thought I recognized yuh," he said, looking at Ken. "Yo're the guy that squawked so hard over to Monte when they disqualified you for abusin' a hoss. I thought I recognized you, all right."

Ken looked searchingly at Tim; his eyes went open, then closed in an angry squint.

"Now, listen, kid," continued Tim softly. "If you ride in this contest this afternoon, you'll get just as square a shake as you can at any of the big rodeos. I don't know much about this man Barney here. He looks square. But I know Brad Ogden. He and I are a majority.

"Now git back there before you disqualify yoreself fer beefin' before yo're hurt. Git."

"Who are you?" bluffed Ken, glowering.

"Well, my name's Tim among my friends, but they know me as Typhoon Tadlock where there's any trick riding to be done."

"My gosh," exclaimed Ken Banks, "you don't mean it!"

"You damn' betcha I mean it," replied Tim. "Now git back there, kid, and shut up and ride if you expect to get anywhere in this show."

FOR a moment the crowd stood taut. Then Tim turned, walked out of the circle, followed by Ogden and Barney.

"Who is the sassy little guy, Ken?" asked Jeff of his brother.

"He's a ridin' gent, that *hombre* is," said Ken, a little awed. "A ridin' son-of-a-gun!"

"All right, now that you've got that out of yore system," blustered Tom Barney, "let's get goin'. Ken, yo're next up."

Ken Banks hurried to the side of the chute, grabbed the saddle, threw himself up on the corral poles. His horse, a little mousy gray, was humping down in the chute as though if she got low enough she would be able to crawl under the bandage over her eyes. She was saddled quickly.

Tim Tadlock spoke to Barney.

"That feller has a six-gun on his belt," he said sharply. "Do you leave 'em ride with guns on 'em here?"

"No rule against it," replied Tom. "Why?"

"Well, it aint quite accordin' to Hoyle, but let it pass," said Tim briefly.

"Let 'er go," bawled Ken Banks. He was on the little mare, jabbing her with spurs, ready for the first jump out into the open space.

The mare reared back in the chute, came down, ran out straight, shied, gave a couple of perfunctory jumps and then went running straight down the field.

Ken Banks was waving his arms, and raking the mare's sides with his spurs. His hat was flailing her eyes. Ken's hand dropped to his hip. The next moment he was slapping the horse around the head viciously with his riding-glove.

But two men, Tim Tadlock and Brad Ogden, saw something besides a glove crashing over the eyes of the little mare. Ken Banks, angered because the mare had run instead of bucking, had grabbed his gun and was beating the unoffending horse over the head. This was hidden from the grandstand, was hidden from part of the men around the field. But it was in plain view of the judges.

"See that?" yelled Tim, grabbing Brad. "Why, the damned whelp! Come on!"

The stubby little man with the bow-legs started on a quick run down the field. Brad followed. Lucius Moon was racing his big gray, trying to reach Ken.

"You pup!" puffed Tim as he came charging up to where Moon had grabbed the head of the mare.

"That's no way to do, Ken," stormed Lucius Moon. "That was a dirty trick. You don't expect to get nowhere with them tactics, young fellow."

"He wont," bawled Tim Tadlock. "He's disqualified himself, plumb disqualified."

"The hell you say," bawled Ken Banks, throwing himself angrily from the mare. "What makes you think I have?"

"Don't bluff, Banks," snapped Ogden. "I maybe can stand seeing a man abuse a horse when he's red-hot mad and the horse is a lunkheaded fool, but you hammered that little mare over the head with your gun without reason."

"You can't prove it. I'm framed!" stormed Ken Banks.

Others were running up. Attention had suddenly shifted from the ends of the chutes to the open field where Lucius Moon, sitting angrily on his big gray, held the bridle of the quivering mare. Tom Barney was among the first to arrive; Jeff Banks and Jap Banks were behind him.

"What's the row?" demanded Barney, puffing as he pushed his way to Ken Banks.

"That young skunk hammered that little mare over the head with his six-gun," boomed Tim Tadlock, his voice suddenly seeming to get much too large for his abbreviated body. "Dirty trick! He's disqualified so far as I'm concerned."

"I didn't see it," said Tom Barney.

"Well, I did," said Ogden angrily. "Plenty of it. Any fellow that does a trick like that, abuses a horse the way he did, ought to be run off the lot."

"I'd like to see you try it, forester," bawled Jap Banks, coming over toward Ogden. "You've horned in here where you weren't wanted anyway. What do you know about buckin' contests, anyway?"

"I know enough to know when a man does dirty tricks like hammering a horse with a gun-butt. He ought to be thrown out of the show."

"I'm challengin' yore right to be judge right now. You two framed Ken," cried Jap Banks. "Yo're trying to get back at some of us forest users that don't agree with you."

"Forest work is clear out of this," snapped Ogden, thoroughly angry.

"It is not. You disqualified Ken, here, because he could ride. Because you didn't want to see none of us Cañon Creek fellers come off with the prize. The whole darned thing is a frame-up, I tell you. A frame-up to get my kid disqualified." Banks was stamping around the tiny open space in the center of a crowd of shoving men.

The buzz of quick sharp questions were racing through the increasing crowd. Through the mass came Hurley Moon, pushing his way. Behind him strode Tillamook Thompson.

"What's the matter, Ogden?" demanded Hurley. "What happened?"

Ogden told him.

"He should be disqualified," declared Hurley, turning on Ken Banks.

"Who's he to judge, that low-lifed polecat of a forester? What does he know about ridin'? Worst thing he's ever rid is a swivel chair. It's a frame-up. He aint qualified to judge none of this, nohow. Get some new judges that know how to ride," bellowed Jap Banks.

With a quick step, Tim Tadlock confronted the dark face of Banks.

"Now, you've popped off enough, my friend," said the little man. "You've said about all one man should in one day, maybe more'n yore share. I happen to know that this Brad Ogden does know how to ride—anything with hair on it. I know it for a fact."

"Yeh! You two have teamed up to bust Ken. Tom Barney didn't see it."

"But *I* did," boomed Lucius Moon from where he sat holding the mare, which still shook from the hammering she had received. "And here are the marks on the animal to prove it, if nothin' else."

The crowd turned; an ominous murmur rippled through it. To fight a scrappy bronc' to a finish is man's work. To abuse an inoffensive horse is sheer brutality. The temper of the crowd was reflected in that buzz of anger caused by Ken Banks' act. Jap Banks heard it. He started bawling louder.

"No contest, no contest!" he yelled. "Them judges aint qualified."

"Now, listen, friend," said Tim Tadlock, taking his position before Banks again; "I said you'd said about enough for one man for one day. I tell you that Brad Ogden *does* know how to ride, and about buckin' contests. Just because you don't know nothin' about it is no reason it aint so."

"He can't prove it," snarled Ken Banks, stepping close to Tim. "He may say so, but he can't prove it."

"That's it, he can't prove it," echoed Jap Banks.

"I think he can," said Tim softly.

"I don't think he can ride a spindle-shanked, string-halt, spavined livery plug, let alone a fighter," cried Jap Banks angrily.

"How much do you believe yoreself, Mister?" asked Tim Tadlock, a hint of innocence in his voice. "If you've got a hundred bucks that talk that way too, I'll just take 'em along."

"Here, Tim," protested Ogden as he stepped forward. "You're ropin' me in on something. It isn't proper to get makin' side bets with the contestants that way."

KEN BANKS turned on Brad. The hate he had nursed from that day on the lookout when Brad had jerked him away from torturing Della Gordon was fanned into a fresh flame. His lips curling back, he thrust his face forward.

"Yo're a coward!" he snarled. "Yellow—yellow as hell!"

Brad stood white-lipped. His hands were tight gripped. He wanted to fight. But there came like a flash the thought that if he smashed out with his fist, landed one good clout on the jaw of young Banks, and then turned to take another swing at Jap Banks before the fight could be stopped, that he would be but furthering the cause of Lucius Moon, Gordon and his other enemies. Caverley only needed another such row to make Brad out as quarrelsome, and therefore a menace to the welfare of the Service.

A big body crashed past Brad, slammed into Ken Banks. Ken staggered; an arm

shot up, fists flashed. Bystanders leaped in and pinioned arms.

"He can't say that 'bout my chief," cried Tillamook as he wrestled to get free. "No young whelp of the Cañon Creek outfit can call him no names like that."

Ogden stepped forward. His face was white. He was fighting desperately to keep control of himself. When he spoke, it was with an effort, but his voice was level.

"I guess you've forced this, Tillamook," he said not unkindly. Then he turned to Tim. "Make that proposition again, Tim. Shake your hundred at this Banks outfit. If they've got the guts to take it, I'll ride Flashlight and give this bunch an honest-to-God show—if I don't get killed in the first jump!"

Quick silence spread over the crowd.

"Flashlight!" It was almost like a breath sweeping from mouth to mouth. That man-killer was known wherever *rodeo*-riders gathered.

"Atta boy, Brad!" yelled Tim Tadlock, starting to dance a little in his excitement. "Atta *boy!* You show up this yellow four-flusher. —Now, you," he said triumphantly, swinging on Banks, "shut up or put up. Do you still think this buddy of mine kain't ride? Do you still want to risk yore hundred? Damn your bones, you bluffer, let's see your money!"

The men still held the arms of Tillamook. Ken Banks stood glowering at the whole assembly.

"And here's another hundred," bawled Tim, shaking a fistful of green notes in Jap Banks' face. "Here's another century that says that young four-flusher of a son of yores kain't ride old Whirligig, that's over there in the corral. Now, are you a woolly wolf or are you a dinky little yappin' coyote? Come on, what you doin'?"

Eager faces turned on Jap Banks. The crowd was suddenly in sympathy with the little man from Wyoming, who was prancing around the small circle, daring the glowering Banks to back his judgment as to the riding ability of his own son. For the moment the brutal treatment of the mare was forgotten in this new contest that was brewing; the men released Tillamook.

"I'll take it! Find your man to hold stakes," burst out Banks. "Put up both hundreds."

He strode out of the circle. His sons and some of the Cañon Creek ranchers followed. They formed a close group. In a moment Jap Banks came back, his face dark, his scowl deeper than before. In his hands he had a wad of bills.

"Who holds these?" demanded Banks. "Who's stakeholder?"

Tim turned to Ogden, who glanced around the group. If he indicated either Hurley Moon or Tillamook, there would be partiality in his choice. Banks might back out on those grounds. Ogden's eye rested on old Lucius Moon where he sat.

"Let him hold it," he said, pointing to Lucius. "He's one of the arena officials. He and I don't agree on some things, but you can trust him with money, Tim."

"All right, old-timer," cried Tim as he trotted to where Lucius sat. "Here's two hundred bucks. One hundred that Brad Ogden can ride Flashlight to a finish, and the other that young Banks over there kain't sit on Whirligig nohow!

"Does that *hombre* suit you, Banks?" he demanded as he turned from old Moon.

Banks nodded surlily. It was more of a concession than he had expected. He had hoped for another chance to protest. Old Moon looked down at the money in his hands, then at Ogden, then at Tim, finally at Jap Banks. His eyes strayed to Ken Banks, and there was a scowl on the face of the old man. His eyes shifted to rest on Ogden and there was a queer look in them, a look that held some grudging admiration. Hurley Moon, watching his father's face, smiled quizzically.

CHAPTER XI

NEWS that there was a side bet on, that there had been another outbreak between the Forest Supervisor and the Cañon Creek bunch, that there were two famous outlaw horses in the corral that Brad Ogden and Ken Banks were going to ride on bets, flew through the crowd. The business of deciding the riding champion of the Leetsdale Rodeo was pushed aside. All realized that shortly there would be a display of wild-horse riding that had never before been equaled in the dusty little grounds where Leetsdale's annual rodeo was held.

As Brad Ogden pushed through the crowd, Tim Tadlock stepped into stride beside him. Hurley Moon stopped for a moment and talked earnestly to his father, who still held the reins of the mare.

"Ever seen Flashlight in action?" inquired Tim.

"Not that I can remember," replied Ogden.

"Well, he has two or three special tricks," said Tim. "One is to walk on his hind feet, then twist as though he's goin' to fall backwards, but come down buckin'. It's got more men than I can count on my fingers.

"And there's another thing he does: He has a trick of jumping sideways kinda doubled up, and buckin' at the same time, several times in succession. Never seen no other trick like it. He can stand still and start that one."

"Aren't you a little afraid of your money, Tim?" chided Ogden.

"I covered the bet," answered Tim, grinning broadly. "I know that young feller kain't ride. He's dressed too much like one of them stage bronc'-twisters to do a good job of ridin'. He looks the part, but he aint it. Anyway, you've changed a lot since I last saw you, if you kain't ride either of these outlaws. They're tough, plumb bad. But you can sit old Flashlight, I know. At that, he's worser than t'other one. Say, if he does spill you, Brad, start scramblin' for the tall uncut when you hit the ground. He'll come at you like a tiger and try to smash you with his front feet. He's bad."

THEY walked briskly toward the chutes. Banks of cow-men were straddling the top rail and looking down to where the two renegade horses were plunging through the pack that fought and churned within the confines of the pole fences. They were still a hundred feet from the corral and chutes when Brad felt some one touch his sleeve.

"Why, Ted!" he exclaimed. "How did you get out here?"

"Is that true, Brad," she asked a little breathlessly; "that you are going to ride a man-killing outlaw? On a bet?"



"He can't say that about my chief!" cried Tillamook as he wrestled to get free.

"Not my bet, Ted," assured Ogden. "My friend Tim Tadlock, old buddy from up in Wyoming, made the bet. Tim, this is my right-hand man on the Forest—Miss Hathaway, our clerk."

Ted gave Tim a bright, swift nod, then turned quickly to Brad again.

"What was the row about Ken Banks?" she asked. Ogden told her.

"Then this ride is part of the fight with that Cañon Creek outfit?"

"It sure is," replied Brad. "I started out to help Barney keep things straight in the arena here. But I got all tangled up in a row with that Banks family instead. Some of the other ranchers are ready to mix in too if there is any trouble. I saw that back in the crowd there. I've got to make that ride now or admit they've bluffed me."

Ted hesitated a moment, then said slowly: "Brad, I don't want you to take any chance of getting all broken up. I've seen that happen with really bad horses.

I'd never forgive myself for advising you to act as a judge if you were hurt, Brad. This horse is a bad one, isn't he?"

"Plumb bad," volunteered Tim. "Plumb bad, lady. But if you aint seen this Supervisor of yores straddle a bad bronc', yo're in for one of the prettiest exhibits you ever seen. Don't yuh worry, Miss Hathaway. Brad Ogden'll be on the job tomorrow, and I'll be a hundred berries to the good!"

Ted turned on him and smiled.

"Thank you, Mr. Tadlock. I've seen Brad Ogden ride, but never on a renegade. You think Brad can handle Flashlight?"

"I've put up a hundred cold dollars on my belief," replied Tim emphatically.

"Well—I wish you luck then, Brad," said Ted earnestly, as she started back toward the grandstand. "All the luck in the world. I want you to know I'll be sitting over there just praying for you hard!"

"By cracky," breathed Tim, "if I had a lady like that one wishin' me big luck afore a ride, I'd straddle the tail end of a Kansas cyclone and ride it until I could make it jump through a hoop! Doggone you, Brad, it's up to you to make good."

"You're right, Tim. Let's get goin'."

HURLEY MOON came up at the moment.

"Can I help you, Brad?" he asked.

"You can, Hurley. Go over with Ted. If anything happens, just keep her out of it. She was out here a moment ago, and is all strung up. It's just possible I might get spilled, you know. I don't know how she would act with any one of our Forest men out there gettin' messed up by a stomping bronc'. She looks on us all as brothers or somethin' of the kind, I guess."

Hurley gave Ogden a quick sharp look, nodded and turned to hurry toward the grandstand, catching up with Ted.

"Got a good stock saddle for you, Ogden," said Tom Barney, coming up. "One of the boys you know from beyond the range said that he and you take the same length stirrup, so we're all set."

Brad moved over to the empty chute. Barney followed.

"Which one fust?" demanded Barney. "You or Ken?"

"No difference to me. Ask young Banks."

"Hey, Ken, which of you two ride fust?"

"He started this," growled Ken. "Make him."

"Make 'em draw for it," broke in Tim. He fished out a dollar out of his pocket. "Heads, Brad rides first; tails, this Banks fellow rides first. Watch 'er fall!" He flipped the coin high in the air. Men crowded around. Carefully Tim brushed the surface of the dollar. It was tails.

"Oh, all right," said Ken grouchily. "It don't make no difference to me. I'll show 'em how to ride, and then they can watch that Forest man take his falls."

"You aint got no more money to argue with, have you?" asked Tim. Ken answered with a dark look and moved away.

"Get that Whirligig in fust," bawled Tom Barney as he climbed to the top of the corral. "Hey, you, Jack, get behind him and shoo him into the chute."

"Get behind him yoreself," challenged the puncher, leaping to the walls of the corral as the black demon Whirligig came thrashing through the crowd of milling horses, heading for him.

A moment later, Whirligig was caught in a jam of other horses near the chutes, shoved in, and then was rigged up for the saddle to be adjusted.

Ken Banks, pale around the mouth, moved over to test the cinch. He took out a cigarette from his pocket, lit it, puffed a moment, threw it away. His hand shook a little.

"He's a mite buffaloed," said Tim at Brad's side. "That kid's half licked right now, you watch!"

"All right; everything set?" asked Tom Barney. "Ride to the finish, Ken. No one is goin' to whistle fer a pick-up man to come and take you off, but Moon here is goin' to keep close in case anything goes wrong. Now show 'em yore stuff, kid."

THERE were calls of encouragement to Ken as he got ready to drop into the saddle before the big black horse was turned loose. Out of the noise and shouts floated a penetrating voice—Tim Tadlock's:

"Yo're goin' to get throwed, cowboy," he called.

Ken turned with quick, fierce gesture.

"I'll show you, you damned smart Aleck," he snapped.

Poised over the saddle, Ken Banks seemed to hesitate. Then he dropped. He had taken off most of his excess plumage, and was ready for all of the riding that was in him.

"Cut her loose," he yelled. The barrier fell.

Like a bolt from a crossbow, Whirligig leaped out.

Sideways, four feet on the ground, then all in the air, down again, up, sideways, down. Legs stiff one moment, then loose and sagging, only to gain new force in a quick vicious spring.

Dust came up, and fogged the view. The crowd at the chutes surged ahead, then went scurrying back as the horse came careening by in an effort to leap in side jumps from under the rider.

Ken Banks was sitting erect, swaying with the leaps, letting the first fury of the horse spend itself. His left hand was held high, his arm giving with each plunging movement.

"He kin ride a little," said Tim under his breath. "Doggone, he actually kin. But it aint over yet."

"Ride 'im, Ken—ride 'im!" shrilled lean Jeff Banks with his big hat in his hand, dancing along the edge of the crowd standing at the chutes.

At the side of the dust-storm that was formed by Whirligig's flashing hoofs rode Lucius Moon, alert, watchful, ready for any quick break that would show that Ken was in danger.

Down the center of the arena lurched the maddened horse, halfway to the grandstand. He turned, twisted, stood still the fraction of a second, seeming to gather himself, and then came a series of whirling jumps, sidling twists, rearing up in the air, down stiff-legged, then a quick jump. Ken Banks swayed.

"He's goin'," yelled Tim Tadlock. "Goin', by gravy! Look boy, look!" He clutched Ogden.

Whirligig had spun around completely, end for end. He jumped, sagged, pitched into the air, flung himself sideways, grunting, stopped.

Ken Banks was jerked half out of the saddle, leaning over at a perilous degree.

Quick, sharp, like the ripple of big waves on a flat beach, there came a sound on the field. It was a gasping whisper of human voices. The man was losing. Everyone sensed it.

Up again, sideways, around, down, up again, then sagging and springing, the tireless black fought. Another leap end for end!

It was the break for the finish. Ken Banks grabbed for the saddle-horn.

"Pull leather, dang you, pull leather!" yelled Tim.

"*Yow-iee—yow-iee!* Go it, black, go it!" bellowed the big voice of Tillamook.

Ken Banks had not reached the saddle-horn. His body pitched over farther; he grasped desperately at the one hold that might keep him in the seat. His hand slipped.

Then through the center of the dust-cloud came the charging gray of Lucius Moon. Almost as Ken Banks began hurtling through the air, Moon grasped him under the arms and dragged him away from the flickering hoofs of the black horse to safety. Ken Banks had been fairly bucked loose from his seat. Whirligig had won.

"Feel yore money slippin'?" called Tim to Jap Banks. "Feel that hundred leave yore pocket?"

Jap Banks turned on him sourly.

"I'll even on you this next ride," he said, scowling at Brad. "The ridin' aint done yet, remember that! This dude's goin' to kiss the dirt now."

Out in the arena Ken Banks was standing to one side where Moon had dropped him after lifting him clear of the dangerous space where the horse still fought the saddle. At the side of the dust-storm was Moon, waiting and watching where he could get in and grab the lead rope of the horse. Another rider was coming from the other side to help head the renegade back toward the corral.

"Your time to show 'em, Brad," said Tim.

"I hope I do, Tim."

FLASHLIGHT, a white-maned light sorrel, big of bone, long of leg, with a nose that humped, big nostrils, small shifty eyes set high, was already crowded into the chute. Ogden took one swift look at him and knew that there was a horse that had more stamina, more brains, more fight, than even the big black Whirligig.

"Pray for me, boy!" he said to Tim. "And do it quick and pious."

"Give 'im hell, fellow," was Tim's reply.

Ogden looked at the saddle. He had tried it a moment before and found the stirrups set right for him. It was a saddle not unlike one of his own, and he knew it was well suited for the fight ahead. He watched closely as the cinches were tightened. Flashlight hunched, humped his back, settled down on his haunches. He grunted angrily. His eyes, blindfolded, kept him still.

"All ready," said Tom Barney, as he stepped back from the chute. "Show 'em what you got, Ogden."

Brad Ogden climbed the side of the chute. For an instant he paused. The wild yelling of the crowd came to his ears. He flashed a glance at the arena. Lucius Moon was out there waiting for the horse demon that would come hurtling from the pens in a moment. Over in the grandstand sat Hurley and Ted. Near the chutes were most of the Cañon Creek stockmen. Ogden ground his teeth, his lips curled back in his fighting grin. He looked down at the horse, then out beyond the chute to where Banks and some of the other Cañon Creekers were yelling derisive taunts.

"Cut 'er loose," he cried, and dropped.

The animal under him sprang wildly. The bandage was jerked from the hands of the cow-waddy who had started to remove it. Up came Flashlight, reared, started to turn, then came down straight with the chute, jumped forward three stiff-legged jumps, and stopped.

"Get the bandage," yelled Tom Barney, starting to run forward. It was flapping around Flashlight's eyes.

"Back," ordered Ogden, his voice sharp, commanding.

He leaned forward in his saddle, reached for the cloth, caught an end, jerked it free.

Up in the air, with the earth sinking away beneath, then down to the collision on all four feet of the horse. Flashlight jumped, dived, threw down his head. He lunged into quick side jumps. Ogden swayed easily. Flashlight squealed, sprang forward, came down with all four legs stiff. He shook his head, snorted, threw up his nose, rocketed forward.

OGDEN sensed the force of the springy muscles under him, could feel them become taut like quickly jerked wires of steel. Flashlight squealed and bolted from a low crouch, hurtling into the air. Up again, he reared on his hindlegs. He walked quickly for several short steps, shaking his head angrily as he pranced. Down again, twisting as he fell, almost catching Ogden off his guard.

High again reared the horse. Up, almost as though he were going to fall sideways. Then down like a flash, jumping, leaping, twisting, plunging, tossing his head and letting out that hoarse challenge in a high-pitched squeal.

Choppy plunges covered half the distance across the arena. Ogden could see the faces in the grandstand. They were blurred and strange. The jarring had set his head and hands tingling. He wondered if this kept up for any time if he would be jolted into dizziness. He shook his head to clear it. Gustily he blew the dust from his nostrils.

He and Flashlight were the center of a foggy, dusty turmoil that choked him. At the edge of this vortex rode old Moon on his dappled gray. Ogden felt a certain security after seeing the old man there.

SUDDENLY Flashlight pivoted, dived, seemed to shake from head to tail, then bounded ahead in a plunge, ending with all his feet braced. Ogden felt his weight flung against the pommel of the saddle. A few more extra pounds of force in that jump, and he would have gone over the head of the fighting horse.

Ogden gripped the lead rope. He had not touched the pommel of the saddle, had not pulled leather, but had sat freely and easily all through the twisting, churning, tumbling fight.

Up, down, sidewise, tossing, heaving, pitching, jerking; the horse was not tiring one bit. Grunting, grimly, Flashlight tried his most vigorous tricks. They had put many men on the ground rolling and scrambling away from his hoofs!

"That's my hundred," snickered Tim in the ear of Jap Banks. "Who said that *hombre* couldn't ride, heh?"

"Hold your yap," snarled Banks. "Ridin' aint finished."

Suddenly Flashlight changed his tactics. He went in a quick short series of little stiff-legged gallops right for the stand. He stopped dead at the end of each. Ogden felt his teeth click in spite of tight jaw-muscles, at the end of each jabbing leap.

Whirling then, Flashlight began to run, straight, smooth, at right angles to the stand. He stopped instantly at the end of a hundred yards. Ogden stayed in the saddle. The next move was a series of jumps that jarred Ogden from head to foot.

Then a queer thing happened. Flashlight quit. His head came up, he looked to each side, snorted, then turned and started walking slowly at an angle back toward the corral. The horse had shown all of his tricks, was ready to concede Ogden the victor.

"Why, you darned old quitter!" chided



Through the dust-cloud came the charging gray of Lucius Moon. As Banks hurtled through the air, Moon grasped him and dragged him to safety.

Ogden. "Old Flashlight layin' down on the job. But we gave them some show while you were at it, boy! I'll say that!"

They approached the chutes. Lucius Moon was still riding by his flank, a little closer now, but still watchful.

Hoarse yelling billowed from the grandstand. Tim Tadlock was dancing like a crazy Sioux warrior. Tillamook was yelling taunting remarks to Ken Banks. Hubbub filled the whole arena.

Ogden guided the horse directly in front of the chutes. Flashlight stopped. Ogden sat him easily.

Suddenly from a crouching position, sprang young Jeff Banks. With his wide hat in his hand, he threw out his arms.

"Whoopee!" he yelled, waving the hat.

Quick, sharp, like the staccato recoil of a machine-gun, Flashlight reeled backward—snorted, squealed. A jump, a plunge, kicking, bucking again, the horse tossed, floundered.

Brad was caught napping. He wavered in the saddle. The horse felt it.

NEW fury seemed to envelop the sorrel. Flashlight headed for the men. They scattered. Angry again, filled with man-hate, the horse drove ahead. He brushed the side of the corral, side-swiping Ogden's leg, came hurtling back to where a little knot of riders stood beyond the chute.

The horse stopped, legs set. Ogden swayed forward. He had not fully caught his balance after that first quick unexpected jump. Up again, down, writhing, up, then down and sidewise, they hurtled.

A quick stop. Ogden swayed, clutched for the saddle pommel, swayed farther. There came a vicious, gigantic, convulsive heaving under him. It caught him half out of the saddle.

The next instant he was free, sailing, plunging forward toward the ground in front of the fighting horse.

Ogden had his breath jarred out of him as he struck. He was down in the dust. Flashlight was squealing in man-hatred.

Ogden looked up. There were the blazing eyes, the wide red nostrils of the horse only a few feet away.

Flashlight's front feet came up, lifting, lifting; he screamed again, shrilly.

The hoofs started down, while Ogden, crouching on his hands and knees, was trying to scuttle clear.

Something big, powerful, bolted through the dust, flying, plunging. Flashlight, his front feet in midair, staggered away as that force hit him, and Ogden leaped free.

The mad sorrel, intent on trampling the man now that he was out of the saddle at last, was still stumbling in an effort to reach him when Ogden glanced up.

In the turmoil of dust, there appeared

dimly the figure of old Moon on his horse. The shoulder of Moon's gray had caught the man-killer Flashlight as he dropped toward Ogden, and had thrown him back and away.

There was howling of voices somewhere. For an instant the grandstand had been hushed like the quiet of death. Women stifled half-formed screams; men, surging to their feet, gritted teeth, smothered curses, for those few seconds that Ogden was down in the dust. Now they were hysterically yelling themselves hoarse.

Another horseman crashed by. Moon came charging back. Flashlight dodged. No bucking now; that was past. He was intent on reaching the man he had thrown. But by quick, shifty dodging, the gray cow-horse headed him back to where he was shoved into the corral, and from there into the chute, where willing hands were soon unstrapping the saddle.

As he reached safety, Ogden was caught by strong friendly arms, congratulated on every hand. Tim Tadlock hammered him enthusiastically.

"You ol' son-of-a-gun, you ol' son-of-a-gun!" he said over and over.

Lucius Moon came riding up to Tim.

"Here, stranger," he rumbled. "Here's the pot. You won on both rides."

"Hey, Lucius!" protested Jap Banks, shoving forward. "That Ogden was throwed—throwed! The Flashlight horse pitched him!"

"Dry up, Banks," some one yelled in the crowd. "What do you call ridin'?"

Lucius Moon turned on Banks.

"You shut up, Jap," he commanded sharply. "You and yore two kids have made jackasses of yourselves enough for today! Ogden rode Flashlight—Ken didn't ride his horse. The pot goes to that *hombre* from Wyoming."

Jap Banks scowled into the face of Lucius Moon. Then he turned, strode toward the corral and pens and a moment later mounted his horse and hurried from the rodeo grounds.

At that moment Brad Ogden realized the power that old Moon—rugged, domineering, intolerant, but square—held over the people who lived in Cañon Creek. He got a flash of the qualities of this his most powerful enemy. Impulsively Brad stepped forward, holding out his hand.

"I want to thank you, Moon, for saving me some busted ribs," he said with quick hearty friendship hinting in his voice. "I'd been on my way to the doctor by now if you hadn't moved quick and sure."

The old man looked down to the outstretched hand. His eyes traveled up slowly to meet Brad's eyes.

"Yo're no friend of mine, Ogden," he growled, his eyes narrowing. "Save yore friendship for that fool son of mine!"

"Why," protested Brad, taken back by the quick rebuff. "I just wanted to thank you for tearing in there to keep me from being stamped."

"Save your breath," snapped Moon. "You and I'll never bunk in the same outfit, Ogden. Yo're standin' in my way right now, and I'll bust you as sure as God made little apples, so help me Cæsar! Why, hell and three cheers, I'd 'a' done that much for my worst enemy! Them Bankses aint given yuh a fair break all afternoon and I'm not goin' to stand by and see a man jobbed like that. But remember that forest grazin' thing is different. I promise you I wont save you from nothin' in that, never!"

The old man turned quickly, strode to his horse, leaped easily into the saddle, and started back to his place by the chute.

"IF there are no more objectors to these here judges, we'll get goin' and run off them prizes now," announced Tom Barney. "Any objections to these two men continuin' as judges, gents?"

"Hell, no," came from several quarters.

With some horses bucking, a few fighting, a few quitting so cold that the contestants on their backs were given re-rides, the afternoon passed. At the end, the crown of champion buster of the Pinos Altos rested on the modest brow of a young rider from the Q T Lazy B from the west side of the range.

Shadows were long when Brad, dusty, a little sore from the severe shaking he had received, tired, but with a bit of happiness in his heart, walked toward the grandstand to find Hurley and Ted waiting to offer enthusiastic congratulations. With them, Brad, Tillamook, Tim Tadlock and Tom Barney ambled along chatting on their way back to the town.

CHAPTER XII

RODEO and Fourth of July in the daytime meant a community dance in the evening at Leetsdale. The dance-hall was

over the pool-hall, reached by an outside stairway. Around the front of the building crowded ranchers, tourists, people from Hooperville, men in chaps from beyond Grape Creek and the other side of Carmody's District, laughing ranch-girls in dainty frocks, or tourist women in riding-breeches and riding-boots. There was no formality about dress for the celebration, early or late.

Ted had wheedled and Hurley argued; and Brad Ogden had finally agreed to stay through a part of the dance. And with Ted holding to an arm of each, they forced their way through the crowd, up the stairs, and a moment later were within the hall where couples swayed and whirled to the rhythm of the rattling, squealing, thumping, moaning music of the jazz band.

The three found an open place near the tiny stage at the end of the hall, where the orchestra was perched, and from here watched the crowd as it thinned or thickened in the criss-cross trails of dancing feet.

It was a happy, colorful, care-free gathering that stamped and tiptoed through waltz, one-step and fox-trot.

"I want to dance," declared Ted emphatically. "If some one wont ask me, I'm going to start to dance all by myself."

"Come, let's show 'em how," offered Hurley, holding out his arms.

Ted threw back her head, laughing. The next moment they were off in the crowd, Hurley threading their way through open spaces and around jams.

Ogden watched them as they stepped to the notes of the orchestra that now breathed a pleading thread of melody calling to romance, and youth.

Some of the unrest of the past weeks gripped Brad Ogden again as he watched.

"Are you playing wallflower?" came a soft voice at his elbow.

Ogden whirled. He stared into the deep dark eyes of Della Gordon.

He did not reply for a moment, for her loveliness commanded his attention.

"Now, don't scold," said Della with the shadow of a question racing over her face. "I didn't leave the lookout until after dark. The last thing I did was to go up and see that the whole country was smokeless. Dad sent his car to bring me down—wasn't that nice? I'll go back after the dance tonight and keep my eyes open all of tomorrow, too. That all right?"

Ogden laughed. "Sure it is. I never thought, or I'd have told you that it was O. K. to come down tonight if you wanted to. Probably I should have asked one of the boys to come up there to relieve you today. Supposed you would come for the dance. Never thought of gettin' some one to relieve earlier. Gosh, I'm sorry."

"It's just as well," she replied. "You know, I'm really trying to fill my job, right. And getting a sub for today would have been acknowledging that there was some difference between me and the men lookouts that you've had up there."

"Well, there's a difference all right," agreed Ogden. "But I think it is in your favor." There was the hint of admiration in his voice as he spoke. Della flashed him a grateful smile.

"Can't we dance?" she asked.

"Oh, sure. Stupid of me not to ask you," said Brad. "I'm dumb tonight!"

For several moments Ogden was fully occupied with finding a way through the crowd. Then the floor near them cleared a little, and he became more conscious of the easy, swinging partner in his arms. He glanced down, but Della was looking through the crowd. A few moments later, as they stopped and the clapping and stamping for the encore quieted, she looked up radiantly.

"That was nice," she said.

"I enjoyed it," said Ogden. "There's Hurley and Ted over there in the corner. Come on over—I know that Hurley will want a dance."

Della hesitated, then walked forward just a little defiantly.

Ted for the flicker of an eyelid, was a little aloof, but she had promised herself she would be friendly the next time she and Della met, and she thrust out her hand in greeting. Before anything more than greetings had been exchanged, the orchestra started again.

"This is mine," declared Ogden as he stepped in front of Ted and held out his arms. "Come on, dance one with the boss!"

Ted giggled. There was a throaty little catch in it. She snuggled into the hollow of his arm, and they were away in the crowd, swinging and turning with the rhythm of the fast one-step.

THE swift, blood-stirring one-step had just finished when Ken Banks came elbowing his way through the crowd. Ogden had seen him a short time before by the door. He had evidently just arrived

back from the ranch after going there at supper time. He came up to Della Gordon.

"Kin I have this dance, Della?" he asked, ignoring the others.

"Sorry, Ken," she replied evenly. "I've promised this to Hurley Moon."

He was evidently disappointed.

"How about the one after this one?" he asked a little sharply.

"That's taken too, Ken."

Young Banks scowled.

"Well, how about the third one?"

Della's reply was positive.

"I'm going to start home then, Ken. It's getting late."

"Well, I'm takin' you home," he exploded a little angrily.

"Who said?" she demanded.

"Yore old man. He said I could take you."

"Well," burst out Della, her eyes flashing a little, "maybe I've got something to say who I go home with."

"Now, don't get uppity with me, Della," Ken Banks raised his voice a notch. "I've got something important to talk to you about tonight, mighty-important."

She hesitated. Ken Banks was looking earnestly at her.

"The next dance is goin' to be the old-timers' square dance contest," called Tom Barney as he shoved his way through the crowd fringe and took the middle of the floor. "Git yore pardners fer the square dance!"

There was an immediate shuffling of feet and several couples came trotting out to take their positions.

"This is going to take fifteen or twenty minutes," said Hurley. "Can't we go get some sodas or something?"

"Sure," agreed Ogden.

"I've got something I want to talk to you about, Della," repeated Ken Banks. "I want to talk it *pronto*, too!"

SHE hesitated. Ken was partly drunk; that meant he was partly mean, partly unreasonable; but he was very earnest.

"You three go on together," said Della after a moment of thought. "I'll go with Ken. He can tell me what he has on his mind."

"No sir, I'm goin' to take you home," he declared obstinately.

"Now, Ken," she soothed. "Come on. I'll talk to you now while you've got it on your mind. Come." She took his arm and marched him toward the door.

"What do you suppose?" queried Ted.

"Oh, some of this same scrap," said Hurley. "Besides, Ken Banks has always thought that he had some priority claim on Della. I remember a couple of times when I walked home with her from the old school that I had to use my fists to convince Ken that I had a right to just as well as he did. Like kids do, Della and I thought that we were sweethearts then, and Ken was always butting in."

Ogden looked quickly at Hurley. Ted was searching Hurley's face inquiringly. But Hurley was watching Della as she and Ken were finding their way out of the door, a reminiscent smile resting on his face.

"I guess she'll handle him all right, just as she always has done. She's quite a capable youngster, at that," mused Hurley. Ogden realized more than ever that Hurley was perfectly blind to the fact that Della, his old schoolmate, had grown into a lovely young woman.

FIDDLES squeaked. Tom Barney begged for just one more couple to fill out the last set of dancers that were arranged on the floor. The jazz orchestra had given way to an accordion, and two fiddlers that were picking strings and scraping bows preparatory to making attacks on "Old Zip Coon" and "The Devil's Dream" and the rest of the toe-tickling old-time tunes that made feet of yesterday jig through their rhythm.

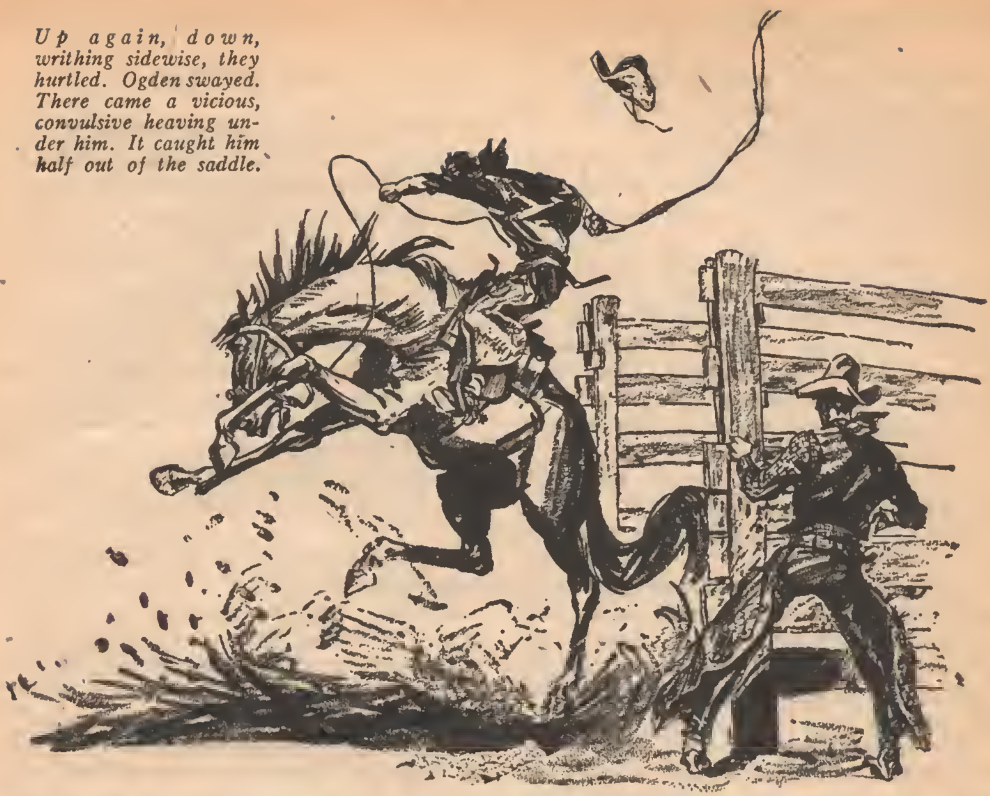
"Let's go," said Hurley. "This thing will be a half-hour getting out of the way."

Greetings from acquaintances as they threaded their way through the dimly lighted store, friendly congratulations from many to Ogden, and then they stood out on the wood-floored porch of the mercantile establishment. Leetsdale was having a hard struggle to keep from slipping back into its usual night quiet, but the voice of Tom Barney bawling, "Alleman' left, to the left, left, left. . . . . Balance yore pardners and gran' right 'n' left," and the shrilling of the fiddles indicated that the night was still young in the dance-hall.

"Come on over to the Trail Blazer a minute," said Ted. "I just want to see that none of these youngsters have walked off with the engine or running-gear."

They strolled along through the thin radiance shed by a midnight moon that had peeked up over the rim rock fringing the eastern side of the little valley around Leetsdale. Thick shadows were darker un-

Up again, down, writhing sidewise, they hurtled. Ogden swayed. There came a vicious, convulsive heaving under him. It caught him half out of the saddle.



der the overhanging cottonwoods that were a canopy over the old car.

"We might as well wait here," said Ted as they came to the long rakish old car. "It's warm and cool both out here, and we can hear the music at the hall."

Hurley piled into the seat beside her; Ogden found a resting place on the running board. The time for Hurley to burn up a cigarette and Ogden to consume a pipeful of tobacco passed in silence, while the three listened to the sounds of the holiday night.

Abruptly some one leaped from an automobile farther up the road, came hurriedly down the street. It was a girl. A man followed, striding quickly. He caught up with her just after they had passed the place where the Trail Blazer was parked. All three in the old roadster recognized the two as they passed—Ken Banks and Della.

As he came up with her, Ken Banks grabbed Della's arm, halted her roughly.

"Now, listen to reason, kid," he expostulated angrily. "I know what I'm talkin'. There aint none of us Cañon Creekers that wont stand by you."

"What do I care about them standing by me?" demanded Della, trying to jerk loose from his grip. "I guess I can stand by myself if I have to."

"You think you kin, maybe. But you kain't. Why, even yore old man is plumb mad about you bein' up there."

"That's not news to me."

"Well, so long as you wouldn't listen to me nohow, maybe you'll listen to him. He told me to talk this to you. I don't know if it's an idea of hisn. Maybe not. But it's bein' talked around. You bein' up there just gives us the advantage if you'll play with us."

"That's a fine proposition—to be a traitor just to please some of the disgruntled ranchers."

"Yo're a traitor already—a traitor to yore old friends."

"Quit pinching my arm so hard, Ken. You hurt."

"Well, you goin' to listen to me, huh?"

"I am listening."

"Well, then will you do what I say?"

"No!"

"Now, Della, be sensible," he wheedled. "All you have to do is to stay down in yore cabin at the right time or have the phone out of commission or maybe play sick or something. No one will know the dif. Leave the rest to us. We'll do the rest. And you bein' in the lookout makes it a dead cinch if you'll only play with us."

Della jerked loose.

"I think you've said enough for one night, Ken," she said, then whirled and started down the road.

Ken Banks was after her in a moment, striding by her side. They did not stop again but went straight to the hall.

The three in the auto were quiet a moment after the rancher and Della had passed from sight and sound.

"Well, that was a sweet bit of melodrama," said Ted brightly. "I'll have to admit that I'm beginning to have some admiration for that Gordon girl. She's certainly taking an independent stand against her father and his cronies."

"And that takes just a little nerve and conviction," breathed Hurley.

"I guess you know, don't you, buddy?" said Brad feelingly.

"But what do you make of this thing that's just happened here under our noses?"

"Some more grief brewing. Sounds like a fire somewhere that they're planning on setting, and Ken's trying to get Della to not report it."

Brad was silent a moment.

"Do you think she'll double-cross us, Hurley?"

"Well, I heard as much as you did, I guess, Brad. I'd hate to think she would. She's a nice little girl. And did you see how pretty she's rigged out tonight?"

"You bet," agreed Ogden.

"Come, it's time to get back," said Ted quickly. "Hurley has this next dance with Della. Maybe he can learn something from her as to what Ken was trying to do."

BUT back at the hall Hurley danced the whole dance without Della's having a word to say. She was quiet, with brooding eyes and thoughts racing elsewhere.

"Have you a way to get home, Della?" asked Hurley as the music stopped.

"I don't know," she said quickly. "My father sent up the car after me. But now I think he might not take me back. It is like one of his tricks to get me down here and then try to persuade me to come back to his ranch instead of getting back on the job at the lookout. That's why he agreed for Ken to take me home, back to the ranch. If he has a chance, he'll try to make trouble between me and Brad Ogden."

"Well, I guess in that case I can drive my roadster up there with you, if that's all right?"

"Thanks, Hurley," she said gratefully. "I'll accept that."

CHAPTER XIII

SEVERAL days passed with only one outstanding incident. The application of Lucius Moon for an additional homestead filing in the timbered area directly above his ranch had been received from the District Office with a request for early action.

"They'll get it," growled Ogden.

He and Tillamook had driven to the location of the filing, had paced the boundaries, had found that Moon had picked the most typical piece of forest land contiguous to his. If he was given this, then the whole back country east of the high range would be eligible to entry with this piece as the precedent on which applicants would base their claims.

"If Caverley forces this through, he ought to be tarred and feathered," declared Brad after they had traversed the boundary. "If Moon gets it, it's good night Pinos Altos! We might as well turn it over, lock, stock and barrel to that Cañon Creek outfit. They'll get it anyway in time, if they just get this one filing approved. Old Moon's used some headwork on this, I'll say."

Tillamook reached inside his pocket, took out the empty .303 shell that he had carried with him since the day Hurley had brought it to the Ranger Station. He turned it over in his hands, looked at the imprint of the hammer. Then he glanced down toward the grayish buildings of the Moon ranch, a questioning look in his eyes.

"You'll be able to spot the mate of that in the dark, Tillamook, if you keep on lookin' at that cartridge just a little more," bantered Ogden.

"I aim to, if I ever meet a shell out of th' rifle that fired this one," declared Tillamook. "Do you think it was old Moon?"

"I really don't, Tillamook," said Brad. "I have a hunch that he isn't quite that sort."

"But that old cuss has done something almost as effective in his line-up on this homestead thing, with Caverley and Cleeland on his side. There's goin' to be hot hell a-poppin' when it gets back to Moon that this application is disapproved."

For the report that had gone back with Moon's application had drastically emphasized the necessity for turning down Moon's request. Pictures taken with the Service camera illustrated Ogden's points. And to insure that it did not get sidetracked in the District Office, Ogden had

made a telephone call late one evening to his friend Hannum, the Chief of Operation.

It was nearly a week after he had sent in this report that Ogden sat humped purposefully over his work-scarred golden oak office desk. His brows were furrowed and he was chewing at a stubby pencil with which he made periodic stabs at a pad of scratch-paper in front of him. Caverley, to add more grief, had taken the most critical time of the fire season to ask for a detailed report on a certain group of timber sales.

Ogden's service uniform tunic was thrown in a corner. His flannel shirt collar was open and his sleeves rolled up. The outer office was filled with the chatter of flying typewriter keys as Ted Hathaway clicked out a memorandum. Concentrated industry was filling the forest office completely.

Ogden got up, jerked the tunic from the floor, yanked out a flabby tobacco-pouch, filled his pipe, flopped himself down in the swivel chair again and furiously started to check over the figures in a column.

In this request for a report at this critical time, Ogden saw one of Caverley's moves to load him with extra work, make him adhere to all regulations and rules, prod him, pester him, bully, irritate, bulldoze him, until he would trip on some important thing—and then Caverley would demand his discharge.

A shadow flashed by the office window. The outer door opened with a snap. The busy chatter of the typewriter stopped in mid-sentence.

"I want to see that Ogden," boomed the voice of Lucius Moon.

Ted answered him, then trotted to the door of Ogden's office. She was big eyed as she stepped inside, closed the door after her, leaned against it.

"It's old Moon," she half whispered. "He's red-hot mad. He wants to see you, Brad."

"Well, I guess I might as well see him," said Ogden slowly.

"But he's wearing his gun, Brad," protested Ted. "You know that there's danger in seeing him when he's mad. He's got a terrible temper; you know that. And I tell you he's just awfully angry."

Ogden shrugged.

"You know what Tillamook said just before he went down to the warehouse a few minutes ago. He said he heard last night that old Moon had threatened to shoot you on sight."

"Yes. I remember that well enough," replied Brad a little tensely.

"Well, why take the chance?" exclaimed Ted excitedly.

"Maybe old Moon's runnin' some chance himself if he comes in here after saying that he was going to shoot me on sight."

"Oh, Brad—"

THE door back of Ted swung open with a quick powerful thrust. She almost sprawled over Ogden's desk. Then she quickly ducked and edged by Moon out of the door.

"I thought you were here," growled Moon. "Gal said she'd see if you were in. If you were in!" he sneered.

"Well, I'm in," snapped Ogden. His tussle with the report requested by Caverley had not been a very helpful prelude to a brush with Moon. Ogden was beginning to get just a bit jumpy from the constant threat of trouble that had hung over him now for weeks. Tillamook's warning had irritated him also. "Have a chair," he invited, meanwhile keeping his eyes constantly on Moon's.

"I aint goin' to stay long," growled Moon.

"All right; what's on your mind?"

"Plenty. Awful damned plenty," suddenly burst out Moon. His hand slowly strayed down to his gun.

With quick darting move, Ogden's lean hand dived into the drawer of his desk. In it as it came out was a big blue automatic that he had carried in army days. He slammed it down in front of him on the desk with a bang.

"Now we can argue on even terms, Moon," he snapped. "Say what you've got to say and hurry. I'm busy."

FOR a long moment Moon looked at the heavy gun on the desk. He licked his lips. His hand near the gun twitched a little. His eyes raised from the desk to meet Ogden's steady unwavering gaze.

"Yo're bluffin'," he snorted.

"Guess again," spat back Ogden.

"You wouldn't use that."

"You can find out damned quick, Moon, if you are dead anxious to know."

Seconds ticked by. The Forest man suddenly realized that the outer office was quiet. He wondered if Ted had keeled over after she had hurried out of the office. He realized in a flash that she was

a better soldier than that. He wondered where she was, if not out there.

Moon still stood taut, his eyes shifting a little, his lips fumbling each other.

"I wasn't bluffing, remember, when I let Tim Tadlock bet Banks that I could ride," jabbed Ogden. "I'll just warn you now, Moon, that in my training squad in the army, I was one of the three high men at pistol-shooting."

Another slight pause. Moon's eyes wavered a little.

"Well, come on, let's have what is on your mind," demanded Ogden, driving his slight advantage as hard as he dared.

Moon moved slightly.

"Did you disapprove my filing on the land up Cañon Creek from my ranch?"

"You bet I disapproved."

"Why, in tarnation?" Moon's voice shook a little from his vehemence.

"It isn't ranch land. It's completely covered with young timber."

"Timber on it! Does that make it fit only fer forest ferever?"

"It's a darned good indication it's forest land."

"That's ranch land, fellow. Ranch land! That timber can get cleared off."

"Not as long as it's under forest management."

"Oh, dang you fatheaded fools!" exploded Moon. "That young ass of a son of mine is always talkin' forest management, forest management—just like it was a religion."

"It is a religion," declared Ogden emphatically. "And I'm going to make a full convert of you one of these days, Moon, in spite of yourself."

The old man scowled, started to say something, closed his lips tight. Brad could see a storm of anger gathering inside of Moon as the dark scowls followed one another on his face.

"I'm goin' to get that land up there!" suddenly burst out Moon. "Caverley said that application would be approved."

"Caverley isn't running this forest by a darned sight. That's timber-covered land at an elevation of eight thousand feet and as long as it is, I'm goin' to block you from gettin' it."

"You disapproved my filing because that was timber-covered, eh? Well, I can fix that.. One good fire—"

"You just set one good fire up there, Moon, and I'll slam you in the pen so fast it'll make your old head swim."

"Like hell you will!" Then Moon suddenly lost some of the grip on his temper. "You damned bureaucratic—"

"Cut out the personalities, Moon," snapped Ogden. "Stick to business."

"Say, you Piute, I'm talkin' business! I was here before there was a national forest. I helped win land up there from the wilderness. These two hands did the work that made that ranch of mine.

"Now you come along thirty years after I've stood the brunt of that work and when I ask for a measly forty that would round out things for me, when I ask for additional grazing, when I ask for anything, you start yore pewee song about forest management and fire protection!

"You and me can't live in the same section, Ogden. Yo're gettin' most awful in my way. Yo're hinderin' me in runnin' my ranch. Yo're buttin' in on us Cañon Creekers and tryin' to dictate to us ontil we're standin' about all we want to stagger under of yore fine-soundin' regulations and popycock. Why, you cock-eyed young squirt, you meddlin' jackass—"

OGDEN had listened without moving under the tirade. There might be a system back of it. Moon might be trying to get him so angry that he would make the first unfriendly move. Suddenly Moon stopped in the fierce denunciation. His hand strayed to his pistol. The cords on his neck tightened. He hunched a little.

Quick as a flash, Ogden's hand dropped over his automatic pistol.

"Take your hand away from that gun, Moon," he ordered curtly. "Quick! Quick, damn you!"

Moon did not move.

"Did you hear what I said!" barked Ogden.

Quiet was his only answer.

A child squalled in the street. A mongrel dog barked outside the office. An auto rattled by.

Slowly Ogden arose. The ugly nose of the automatic moved forward an inch toward Moon.

If Moon made a quick draw, there would be two guns flashing simultaneously. After Tillamook's warning, Ogden would take no chance.

Slowly Moon's hand crept away from his gun. His face was beaded with sweat.

Suddenly he whirled, stamped to the door, yanked it open.

He turned facing the Forest man. An-

ger was wrenching through him. Ogden could see that it was a fight for Moon not to go rabidly mad and start his old gun spitting quick murder.

"Yo're in yore office now, Ogden," he said huskily, tensely. "It aint like it was out in the open. I'd shoot it out with you there. But I aint goin' to start no gun fight here. But I'm goin' to get that land. You can't stop me, now, forest or no forest. And I'll bust you—bust you, by God, if I die doin' it!"

He paused a moment, trembling, then slowly raised his finger and shook it.

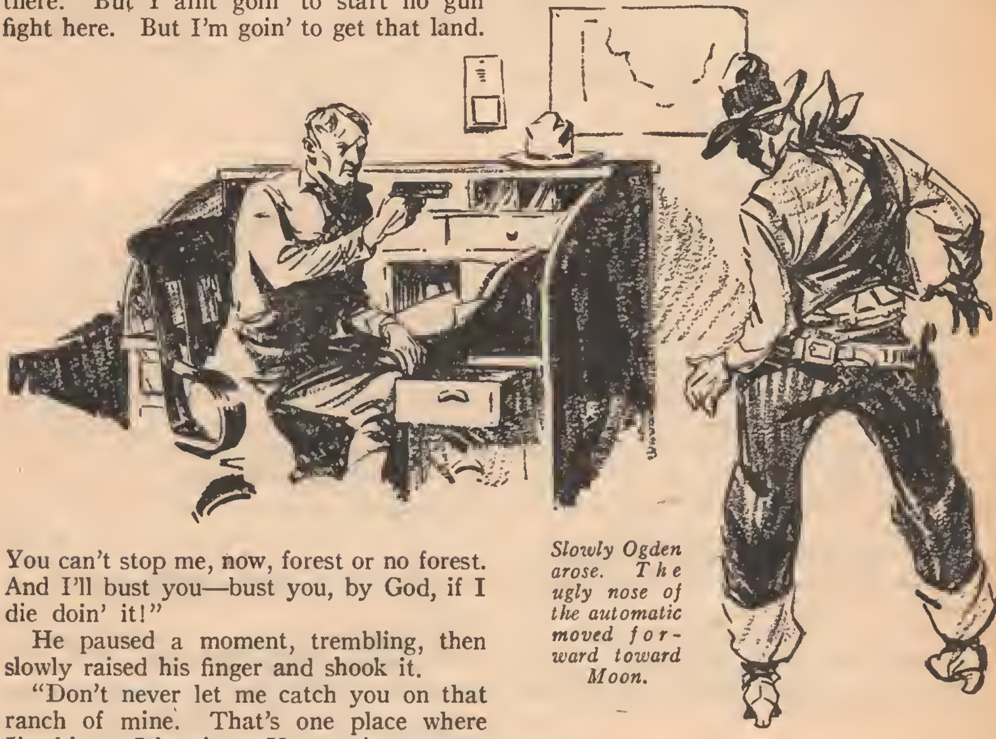
"Don't never let me catch you on that ranch of mine. That's one place where I'm king. It's mine. You can't cross me there. You set one foot on that place and yo're a dead man. The Gove'ment gave it to me, patent, fee simple. And I don't want you on it. You keep off of it. Do you hear me!"

Whirling, Moon flung himself through the door, half ran out of the outer office, slammed through the outer door.

Ogden laid the heavy automatic on the desk in front of him, looked at it for several moments. It was guns now. It had come close to violence, just now, with Moon. What Moon and his friends might attempt since the filing on the homestead had been disapproved by Brad, was a matter of conjecture. They were desperately making their last stand against the new order that they hated so thoroughly. Accustomed to no restraint, no regulation, the men of Cañon Creek would make at least one magnificent fight against the changing, irresistible forces of the new West.

Ogden sighed a little, shrugged his shoulders and thrust the gun back in the drawer. . . . .

The outer door crashed open. Running footsteps echoed in the outer office. They came hurrying to the door of his office. Ogden reached quickly in the desk drawer



Slowly Ogden arose. The ugly nose of the automatic moved forward toward Moon.

and gripped the cool steel of the automatic again.

The footsteps stopped abruptly. Quiet followed. Then came Ted's voice:

"Brad! You there?"

He slipped the gun back into the drawer.

"You bet!" he declared.

Ted and Tillamook hurried in.

"Gosh hang it, they warn't no shootin' at all, were they?" exclaimed Tillamook.

"You sound as if you were disappointed, Tillamook," chided Ogden.

"Well, not 'zactly. But the way Ted came runnin' down to the warehouse, I thought war had started. Kinda looked for old Moon to be all punctured-like."

"How about me being punctured?" asked Ogden, grinning.

Tillamook shook his head. "I've saw you shoot, Brad," he said.

"Moon backed down," said Ogden. "But he's promised me that if I ever set

foot on his ranch, he'll pump me so full of lead that I'll melt down into pipe or bullets."

"Sounds all-fired onhealthy. Gosh, that sounds onhealthy, Brad. You better stay away from his place. He's right hot under the collar." Then Tillamook said very seriously. "No joshin', Brad, if the old man said that he'll probably do it!"

"I'll stay off his place if I can, Tillamook," replied Ogden. "But Moon intimates he's going to set a fire in the Lodgepole. If he does that and I have to get on his land to fight fire, I'll not stay off."

"Now, Brad, don't be foolish, please," said Ted anxiously. "I never saw a man more angry than old Moon this afternoon. I thought he was ready to harm you. If I'd a gun handy, I think I'd—" Her voice trailed off.

"Well, Ted, I'll take you along if I go gallopin' up to Moon's ranch. You can keep the old man covered while I do my work," laughed Ogden.

"Brad!" exclaimed Ted. "Brad, I wish you'd take this seriously. A man threatening your life, a man like Moon anyway, is no joke."

"I'm plumb serious, *amigo,*" said Ogden. "I'd bank on you in a fight with Moon or anyone."

"Guess I'll get back to work," remarked Tillamook and shuffled out the door.

"You really mean that?" asked Ted. She stepped nearer the desk separating them.

"Yes," answered Ogden, looking straight in her eye. "I mean it. Sometimes I feel mighty like I couldn't run this forest, couldn't stay in the fight, without your help."

Muted sounds from the little town came into the room in the pause that followed. Ted looked for something in Ogden's eyes that hinted at more than comradeship. But she was not sure enough to risk smashing the old friendship between them.

"I'll stick," she said slowly, in soft tones. "With you and the forest. I'll play my part here always."

"No," broke in Brad rather impulsively. "No, Ted, that's too much.

"No, you go ahead with any plans you have anytime." His voice grew husky. "The forest will manage to get along. But I wanted you to know the way I feel about our work together."

She nodded, stared at the desk, wide-eyed and thoughtful. Seconds passed. The potent silence was splintered by the jangling telephone. By the time Ogden had finished his conversation with a Forest permittee, Ted was working at her own desk.

CHAPTER XIV

LUCIUS MOON left Hooperville as rapidly as his fast-trotting span of rangy sorrels and spinning wheels would take him. The old man scorned auto travel. He stuck stubbornly to his old buckboard and his team of roadsters.

Angry, upset, damning himself for not following up his threat to kill Brad Ogden, and the next moment glad, he was still talking to himself as he reached the yard of the T. K. ranch.

He dropped the reins, jumped to the ground, jerked open the pole gate. He yanked at the bits of the sorrels until they tossed their heads in protest and then slammed the gate shut after the buckboard was within the ranch yard. He leaped into the vehicle, drove over the gravel-littered ranch yard, stopped the team short in front of a weathered chuck wagon and leaping out again, tied them with a vicious yank of the tie rein, to the rusty tire-shod wagon wheel.

He hurried by the brimming wooden watering tank, near the creaky windmill, through the gate to the house yard, stamped over the wooden floor of the porch and pulled open the scarred wooden door to the kitchen as though he would tear the white knob out by the roots.

"That crazy son of mine around?" he demanded of the colorless woman cook who was peeling potatoes.

The woman reached up a dripping hand, holding a wet potato, brushed back some stringy hair with her forearm.

"He's down beyond the far corral, Mr. Moon," she said in a squeaky treble. "Fixin' some hayin' machinery."

MOON closed the door and hurried by a high corral with sides of bleached aspen poles, through a creaking gate with rusty hand-forged hinges and hook, around the end of a shed with pole sides and roof of curling shingles and then beyond a larger corral, near a machinery shed, he came up to Hurley.

"Hullo," greeted his son as he arose from hammering at a rusty bolt. "Where'd you come from?"



"Get off this ranch!" snapped Hurley. "Git—before I beat hell out've you! You've bullied and bawled and bellowed at me for the last time."

"Hooperville," growled the father. "I'm in a hurry. But I've got something important to say to you first."

Hurley tossed his hammer on the ground. "Shoot," he replied. "What's up?"

For a moment Lucius Moon stared toward the hills. Then his eyes squinted and a scowl settled on his seamy forehead.

"You and I don't seem to be gettin' on very well lately, Hurley," he said with just a trace of sorrow. "Don't appear to be workin' together as we should."

"That's right," agreed Hurley quietly. "Even before I took over the T. K. and started on my own."

"You didn't have to," burst out Moon. "You know darned well that I wanted you to stay with me. There's the home ranch and there's that thousand-acre place on the Pine River. I've got another batch of land over on Grape Creek; the ranch that Collins is rentin'. Together we could have run them all slick as could be."

"Yes, that's old stuff."

"Well, then," Moon's voice raised and his hand began to tremble a little. "Well, then, why did yuh pull out from me, kid?"

"You know well enough," countered Hurley.

"That damned Forest Service," suddenly snarled Moon. "That confounded, meddlin' Brad Ogden and your damned fool ideas of what you call conservation. That's why you quit yore old man!"

"You hit it," broke in Hurley. "You're so blind that you can't see that things are changing. Can't recognize this country going forward while you're standing still. There's a new day coming with good forest management, good—"

"There you go! There *you go!*" broke in Moon angrily. "I've just come from jawin' with that ninny, Ogden and he pops off about 'forest management' and blithers and bawls nonsense about it; and now you start."

"It's not nonsense," declared Hurley earnestly. "Can't you feel the change? You've got to or you'll break your heart buckin' it, Governor. Forest management, conservation, will keep us from—"

"Yeh," broke in the older man. "Yeh, I know what it'll keep us from. It'll keep me from patentin' that extry piece of land I've filed on. Forest management! Forest bunk! This piffle about forest management keeps me from gettin' that land."

"But that land's inside the National Forest," explained Hurley patiently.

"Don't I know it! Don't I know it!

That galoot of an Ogden's been pourin' that into me.

"Inside the Forest! Isn't my old homestead? And didn't I get that? Yuh watch me, kid. I'll get this land; I'll get it!"

"The line-up's changed since you patented that old home place."

"Maybe. Maybe yes. But I aint changed, kid. I'm just the same Moon that came out here in early days. Can't stop me from gettin' that land either."

"How can you get it if your filing's been disapproved?" inquired Hurley. "Appeal it?"

"Appeal? Who to? The Gove'ment? Isn't Ogden a Gove'ment man? What chance have I got with the likes of him? No sir. I'm goin' to take it. Take it, kid!"

"Well, you've got to recognize Forest Service jurisdiction."

"Say!" exploded Moon. Then he stopped. His eyes narrowed. His beard seemed to lay back from his lips, his teeth flashed. For several seconds he stood eying Hurley.

"I've come here to tell you where to head in, kid," he said abruptly. "You can't straddle the fence another day. Now, air you goin' to stop this foolishness and throw in with yore folks, or air you goin' to keep traipsin' off with this forest bunch? You kain't do both. No sir!"

HURLEY could begin to feel the old combat surge between them. It had been quiet for months by mutual consent.

"Just what do you mean?" he inquired.

"You kain't play with this Forest outfit any longer. They're ag'in' me, and you've got to be on my side!"

"I'll take whatever side I think is right," declared Hurley. "You know I will."

"I've given you rope in the past," exploded Moon. "I thought you'd get sense. But yuh aint. Yo're goin' to quit this piddlin' around with Ogden and that gal in the office, or I'll break you."

"Leave out the girl," ordered Hurley, a scowl flashing quickly on his face.

"I will like hell! Yo're chasin' these damned fool ideas about forest management and flirtin' with that young hussy that hammers the typewriter. Yore damned fool head's turned. Gal and forest —forest and gal. Got nothin' but half-addled ideas about both."

"Leave her out," demanded Hurley. His lips were white.

"Yo're goin' to quit foolin' around with both of 'em," roared Moon. "I've warned that Ogden. I've promised him I'd kill him if he comes on my ranch. I mean it! Now listen. Here's the trick that'll blow up the forest management thing. Trees on the land. Trees, heh? Well, fire'll wipe 'em clear. Fire'll do it. And yo're goin' to be on our side when that pops. If you don't, I'll bust you. Yore note comes due before the end of the month. You got it at Hornsbly's bank just because I put my name on it. You'll not get it renewed if I don't endorse it again. And there's only one way you'll get me to sign with you: *Yo're goin' to help me set that fire!*"

"I'll not!"

"Then, by Christopher, I'll telephone Hornsbly that if he lends you money, I'll pull every cent the Cañon Creek men have in his bank out of his vaults."

"Telephone Hornsbly. Set your fire. You'll land in Leavenworth even if you break me."

"They can't prove who sets a fire."

"Well, you've just told me who'd do it. Don't forget that!"

MOON straightened; stiffened. He stood braced. Hurley had been fighting to keep control of his temper. The older man had a loose grip on his and Hurley knew that if the two should get to rowing on the same basis, that there might be blows.

Now old Moon came moving slowly, step by step, toward his son. Hurley backed away.

"You traitor!" snarled old Moon. "You yellow-bellied turn-coat! You'd inform on me, heh?"

"I'm warning you," declared Hurley, still moving slowly as his father advanced. "You go foolin' with fires in the forest and you're in for heap trouble; awful damned big trouble. You've just put enough evidence in my hands that if a big fire cracks loose my own statement can send you over the road. If any other of the Cañon Creekers are mixed up in it, they'll get it too. There'll be red-hot grief for anyone. Take my advice. Don't be so narrow between the eyes."

"Traitor! You skunk of a traitor," growled old Moon. "Listen, kid, this is yore last chance—last chance. Air you goin' to go chasin' off with this forest stuff and that chit of a girl, or air you goin' to listen to yore old man, heh?"

"I've told you to stop talkin' about that

girl. You 'tend to your business, and I'll 'tend to mine!" flared Hurley.

Then suddenly control of his temper snapped.

"You darned old stubborn jackass—you and your whole crowd! You'll get in a jack-pot tampering with this fire in the forest. Get your neck in a noose. And don't say I didn't warn you! Let me tell you, I'm going to get what you've told me on record and if a fire starts, you'll find yourself in Federal court. I'm going to swear to this before a notary and file it with the Forest Service!"

"You—you—dirty low-down traitor! It's that gal! It's that blue-eyed female with her rolled stockin's and her bare legs. She's got you roped, hog-tied and branded. What's she got on you that you kain't think for yoreself ner—"

"Stop that!"

Hurley Moon came driving forward, face white, fists doubled.

The elder Moon swayed away from the vehemence of that rush. He put up his hand to guard his face, and stepped back.

Hurley stopped.

"You've got three minutes to get off this place," he panted. "Just three minutes!"

Old Moon licked his lips. For a second he was taken back by Hurley's tremendous anger.

"Get off this place before I choke the life out of you!" snarled Hurley, swaying forward slightly.

Old Moon was momentarily flabbergasted.

He hesitated, then whirled and strode toward the place where his team was hitched. Moon knew better than to stand before Hurley now. Hurley followed.

"Pull your wires with that banker," he hurled at old Moon. "Set your fires. Play with that Cañon Creek bunch. Bust me! You just try it! You'll learn, maybe too late, that you're in a different world than when you came out here. You didn't know of forest management then. You don't believe it now. You're a blockheaded stubborn, near-sighted old fool!"

BY the buckboard, old Moon stopped. He turned his white angry face toward Hurley. He was about to speak.

"Damn you, get off this ranch," snapped Hurley, stepping forward. "Git before I beat hell out've you. You've bullied, and browbeaten, bawled and bellowed at me the last time. Don't you never go talkin' about Ted Hathaway and me to anyone else. If you do, I'll hunt you down!"

The elder Moon lashed at the horses viciously with his whip. Just beyond the gate, Moon pulled them up on their haunches in a cloud of foggy dust.

"I'm goin' to break you, you upstart! If it's the last thing I do, I'll smash you!"

Slashing his team with his whip, old Moon drove recklessly away.

Hurley Moon walked toward the ranch-house with bowed head and dragging steps. His whole familiar world was disintegrating around him. Hurley Moon loved his father. He had thought at the rodeo he had seen the faint beginning of friendliness between his friend Ogden and old Moon. On other occasions he had thought that his constant preaching for better conservation had got some hold of his father.

But now he believed these hopes had all been without foundation.

Against his will, Hurley Moon now must look on Lucius Moon as an enemy.

In the ranch-house at the Keyhole meadows he knew his gray-haired mother would spend hours grieving because there was no longer even armed truce between the father and son.

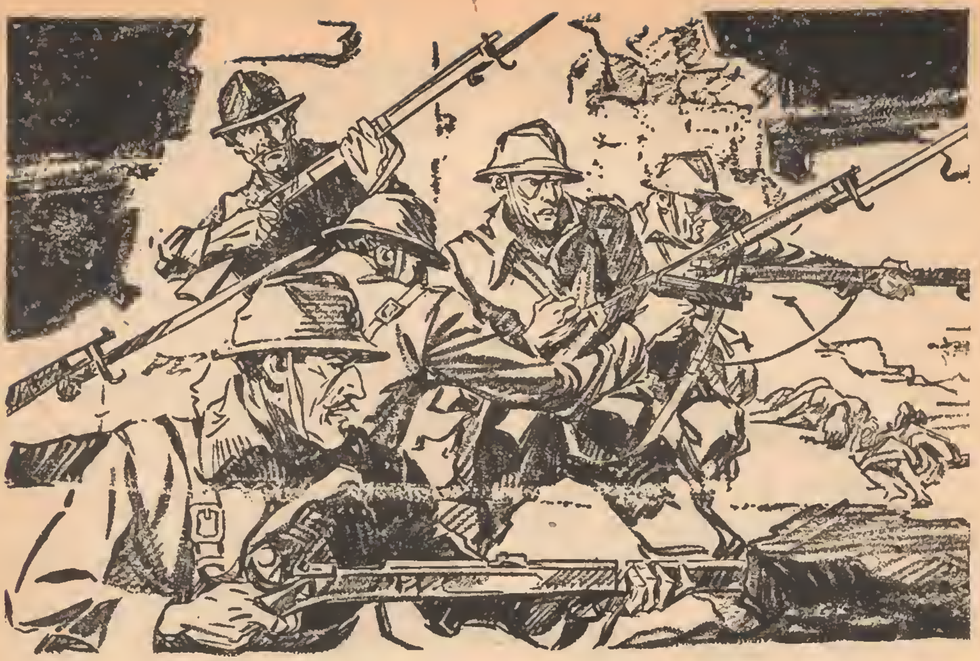
Only one other man loved Hurley's mother as whole-heartedly as he did. That was Lucius Moon.

AT sundown and through hours stretching into night, Hurley stood on the porch looking toward the hills, his homeland. His thoughts were filled with yearning for the days when he had lived happily at the old ranch in the hills; were brimming with tender recollections of his parents. And jumbled in his seething mind were poignant thoughts of Ted Hathaway, her loyalty to the service, and of Brad Ogden, friend, counselor, disciple of better use of our natural resources.

The first rooster crowing sent Hurley Moon to bed but not to sleep.

When he did fall asleep, he was undecided as to whether or not he would ride to Hooperville next day and file with the Forest Service, a signed statement regarding the threats that Lucius Moon had made as to starting fires in the forest. By the time he was fully awake in mid-morning, it was too late.

The concluding chapters of this fine drama of Rocky Mountain life are exciting indeed—in the next, the September, issue.



The HELL'S ANGELS

This stirring story of the Foreign Legion in desperate action is a worthy successor to "A Soldier of the Legion" and "The Doomed Poste."

By WARREN HASTINGS MILLER

"HE is mad, that Englishman—mad! Holy name of a sacred pig!" Stocky little Lieutenant Hortet, of the Foreign Legion, had stopped at the Hell's Angels Squad of his company to see why they were standing in an awed ring around one of their number this early in the morning, and had observed that the center of interest was a naked Englishman taking a bath in a teacup of water.

The appalling temerity of him was too much for even the Hell's Angels Squad, as Sar-Major Ike Smith of Texas had named them. It was cold as blue blazes before dawn in this Légion camp in the Riff mountains! It had been Commandant Knecht's famous salient; it was now a vast military camp, and the bray of the mule was heard in the land—about a thousand of him.

" 'Pears-like them Missouri nightingales aint the only crazy critters around hyar, Looie!" apologized Sergeant Ike for their new English recruit. "This *bleu's* got a strong back and a weak mind, I'm thinkin'."

"Morbleu!" gasped Hortet as the Englishman went on sponging. "Corporal Criswell, he is that tough that one cannot drive a bayonet into him, yet even he would not venture an infliction so terrible! Eh, *mon brave?"*

"Not so's you could notice it, Loot!" agreed the giant Michigander of Hell's Angels, and shook his head regretfully at the Englishman. He hated to see a fine young feller bereft of his reason!

Anzac Bill, the Australian bushwhacker of the squad, goggled aghast at the painful spectacle and took a drink. As for Rosskoff, the Russian, he had fainted. He had never taken a bath since he was born, save for those enforced weekly by the French Government, which did not count, being entirely involuntary.

The English *bleu*—recruit—went on with his bath, disregarding the lot with that sublime indifference toward lesser peoples characteristic of Britons. The fact of total nudity in the presence of half the Légion did not embarrass him in the least. He



SQUAD

It was a perfectly asinine thing to do—charge that redoubt without any idea how they were going to get out again—but they made it in a rush, and hoisted the Riff out.

Illustrated by Paul Lehman

turned about, facing them cheerily, sponge poised in hand: "I say, you chaps, little bit of all right, what?"

He applied a towel with vigor, one eye on his *bidon* of coffee in the camp-fire embers, an eye expectantly on the squad *marmite,* which was bubbling a savory stew. The rest had been content to watch these culinary operations, shivering, having dressed as quickly after reveillé as possible. Hortet growled, "*Morbleu!* He is mad!" Sergeant Ike studied him silently. As top sergeant he was interested in all recruits, and it was Ike's first experience of the British aristocrat. Dude, he would be called, back in unregenerate Texas. But there was more than that to him; an indefinable something that commanded respect, perhaps due to nothing else than that splendid and unashamed nude body. Ike's own huge thews and biceps could break the Englishman in two without effort; Criswell's burly six-foot-four would mop up the camp with him; stocky Anzac Bill could bend him double, and Hortet go through him like a piece of steel; but for all that—

Wham! A Riff .77 from the heights of Tafrant two miles away smacked down into camp and sent up a geyser of stones and débris. It set off all the mules into melodious complaints about the annoyances of war and hurled a largish rock spinning over, to land in the camp-fire and wreck the Englishman's teacup. It was Abd-el-Krim's first morning greetings to the Légion.

"Grief," said the *bleu,* unemotionally. "Personal insult, what?"

He flashed his teeth and shook a fist at the distant Riffians. "Cheerio! Have a chawnce to pay 'em up soon, eh, Top?" he asked Ike.

IKE chewed and thawed out somewhat. He was making up his mind about this *bleu.* He wasn't all dude, even if some one had been light-headed in letting him into the Légion.

"Whyfor you jine up with this outfit of thieves an' bad-men, sonny?" he asked.

"Crash into the jolly old war, what? Perfec'ly priceless."

"Aint ye ashamed, enlistin' in a war what's none of your business jest for the sport o' shootin' up them pore niggers?" Ike reproached him severely, though he knew it was sophistry.

The young Englishman's blue eyes grew stern. "Oh, I say, Top!" he remonstrated.

"Soldiers of civilization you call yourselves, what? If a chap finds everything at home a filthy bore and wants to help civilize 'em, that's what your Légion is for, isn't it? So I crash into the *Bureau des Enregistrements Volontaires* back in that dear Paris, pass the stuffy old tomato of a medico, and here I am, what?"

"Proper spirit, son!" grinned Ike sardonically. "We builds seven miles of roads, beginning termorrer, us Légion mud-hawgs. You wont git no shootin'."

"Right-o!" said the Englishman, taking him seriously. "Give me my pick and shovel. Civilization, what? I've seen Sidi bel Abbes, that you chaps built, to mention just one place. Quite all right for me!"

He seemed asking for that pick and shovel, eager to bend his young back to them—anything so long as it was not the boredom of London—and Ike relaxed.

"Not jist yet, young feller. We'll build the roads, an' rebuild the *postes*, all right; but today we oozes up to Tafrant an' takes her all apart. Thar's a company of tirailleurs there that haint had no water an' no food fer two weeks, an' a double line of Riff trenches all around them. An' thar's that damned gun, opening up soon's daylight—"

Whoom! Another Riff shell landed and slapped a grub-camion off the map. Ike was annoyed. And so was Commandant Knecht, who commanded this battalion of the Second Regiment, Foreign Legion. The big bearded man came roaring out of his tent and queried in the name of a thousand wet hens why the 17th Moroccans, who were sent to abolish that gun the night before, had neglected to do so.

"*Pardieu!* Is it that the Légion has no peace?" he demanded. "Is it that we must go slap that sacred gun ourselves? Ah! *Ah!* . . . . Ressot! Hortet! —*A moi!*"

LIEUTENANT RESSOT was back from the lower Sahara, where he had been on reconnoissance duty with the picturesque Camel Corps. Black-eyed, and sunburned black as a Sudanese, he came along the camp-fires seeking Hortet, shook hands cordially with Sar-Major Ike, joked with the rest of the Hell's Angels, and carted Hortet off to the Commandant's tent. The Légion was to have peace, they announced later; also Intelligence had advised them that Poste Tafrant had helioed it would blow itself up and take a chance on getting out, if not relieved that day. As about a thousand of the Beni Ouriagel and Oulad Kacem were entrenched around them, the chance didn't look very potent to Sergeant Ike!

"Attack kits, you birds!" he passed the word. "Two haversacks, one grub, one grenade, rifles and bandoliers, canteens. I bust any son that shows up with anything but ammunition onto him!"

The bugles were sounding the *Rassemblement Générale*. Yelps from the sergeants called the roll for inspection of equipment as the battalion assembled. It is the Légion's fighting unit, four of them to the regiment. Knecht commanded this one, also the entire Second in his brevet rank of Colonel; but dear to him was his old Sahara Battalion that had fought the Tinghar campaign. To his *garçons* he was still Commandant Knecht.

He came down the line now with his adjutant in tow, Ressot and Hortet at their heels. Bluff, genial, urbane and enormous, Knecht was the original D'Artagnan reincarnated. A line of hands rose to salute across the carried rifle-barrel as he passed. At Ike's platoon he stopped and inquired: "Where is he, that mad-one who enlisted because he wants a wound? *Pardieu!* The reason most singular ever given for entering the Légion! I would speak with this Englishman who is obliged to have a wound!"

"You-all means Jeff, Commandant?" Ike asked, eying the English *bleu* at salute in his file. "He aint mad; he jest hed a tetch this mornin'. Was washin' hisself in a teacup of water, sir."

Knecht grinned quizzically. "I mean the Honorable Geoffrey Royde-Austin, my cowboy! His papers say that he is the son of Lord Austin, and his mother the Irish Countess of Royde— Is it a joke, *bleu?*" he asked the recruit severely, while Ike gaped at all those titles.

"Quite right, sir!" spoke up the man in the ranks. "Jolly old guv'nor wanted me for the Seventeenth Lancers. Nothing in it, sir; chap cawn't wangle any wound there, can he? All silly tinsel and feathers!"

"*Ouff!* Name of God, what have we here!" bantered Knecht. "For *why* must you have a wound, *bleu?*"

The Englishman looked embarrassed, flushed, squirmed on shifting feet under his rifle. "I'd rather not answer that, sir, if you don't mind," he said, respectfully but firmly.

Knecht grinned some more. "*Cherchez*



The Riff knew nothing of thrust-and-parry, and they discarded bayonets for the keen yataghan. Closer they pressed, a ring of steel. Men grunted, swore, labored, with thrust, cut and blow.

la femme!" he laughed. "Is it the Lady Diana Burdwynd, *bleu?"*

"Gad, sir!" burst out the Honorable Geoff, overwhelmed with surprise. "How did you know that?"

"I have a note! From the high-born little lady herself," said Knecht genially, while the Légion listened, all agog over this new reason for joining. "She asks me *not* to put you at making roads—name of a name! She will not have you—unless you can show an honorable scar?"

"That's right, sir!" the Englishman assured him eagerly. "Or her guv'nor will not; and it's all one, for they're alike as two peas. You know old General Burdwynd, sir!"

KNECHT nodded, and all the ranks stirred over that famous name of Flanders battles. Ike felt queer thrills. All the cowboy chivalry in him was stirred by the thoughts of this general's daughter who didn't want her betrothed to be a tinseled dandy of the Lancers—that crack London regiment—but a real soldier, with the proof of his battles on him. They were military people, Jeff's folks, Ike gathered. Their profession was war, had been since before the Crusades. War, the protection of humbler folk; any other service to mankind was beneath their traditions. He would like to see and gloat over, just once, a picture of this girl who had sent her lover out to fight, not to come back until he had a wound! And where else could he get it but in the Légion, these days? One thing was certain; from that time on, Ike and his platoon would make it their business to see that Jeff *got* his wound—and did not get killed in the winning of it! They had to get him back to that girl!

Commandant Knecht seemed to be reading their thoughts, for he said: *"Eh bien!* A wound he shall have, Sergeant Ike! I charge you to see that this Lady Diana shall not faint away at sight of it! Good luck, *bleu! Nom de Dieu*—what an ambition *extraordinaire!"*

He chuckled bluffly and passed on. All the squad crowded around their Englishman. He was a marked man, he and his ambition to bring his girl a wound! All the world loves a lover, but this was an extraordinary pair, two children of Mars. They appreciated her refusal to marry anybody but a real soldier—and some suggested sending Hortet to England at once.

That grizzled old ex-zouzou, who had more wounds than years and was now their lieutenant promoted from the ranks, ought to fill the bill for this Lady Diana, as the Légion saw it!

Ike got Jeff aside after a time. "Buddy, don't you listen to them coarse rubes, none. They means well; and we-all will git ye a fine puncture, ef you aint partic'ler whar you gits it. I aint saying I misjedged ye—'cept I thought ye was named Jeff after good ol' Jeff Davis—but you sticks close to yore uncle, sonny! Them Riff is kinder careless with their hardware. Yore gal wouldn't thank me, none, if I hed to plant you, up yander—"

He waved an arm up toward the heights of Tafrant. Jeff, as Ike called him, interrupted, appreciatively: "Thanks awf'lly, Top! I'll try not to be a—a silly ass, y'know! I'm green, and all that. But—"

Their eyes met. Both were aristocrats, in the last analysis. Men who counted life as worth nothing unless given unselfishly to service of their fellow-men—and in war, where you staked your all in that service, your life. "Like to see her, Top?" said Jeff, and snapped open the cover of his watch in a burst of confidence.

Ike looked. He saw a face such as the Queen of Belgium must have had when a girl—beautiful, understanding, gray eyes, hair superbly groomed, the long and classic features of those born to rule—a vision to Ike of a new world of people: the Old World nobility, serving through life those humbler souls they had to guide and protect. It was a new world to Ike, but instinctively he respected it, could give that girl his service and devotion himself. Things were thus and so in this world; most people still needed ruling. Only in America, and particularly back in li'l ol' Texas, did men run their affairs collectively and do their own protection—with handy six-shooters. Even in America we needed more of what Jeff would have called the "ruling clawss," a body of citizens who gave their whole lives to the welfare of the state, with no thought of amassing money for themselves, with no satisfaction save in a good job of government well done—by people with the intelligence and disinterestedness to do it. . . . Ike recognized that class in Jeff and was all for him.

THE bugles were sounding *"En avant!"* The squads fell in, and in columns of fours the battalion marched out under a gray sky with the sun not yet over the mountains. That gun still kept dropping its compliments every fifteen minutes. It was a nuisance that the Légion would have to abate if they wanted peace o' nights. The Moroccans reported it as occupying a stone redoubt commanding Poste Tafrant and impregnably surrounded by trenches. Besides annoying Knecht's salient, it had been hammering a breach in the *poste* and the garrison would have to be relieved before the gun got through with that. The High Command had instituted these regular daily sorties to relieve the seventy *postes* within Abd-el-Krim's lines, now that the Army of Africa was up and posted all along its hundred-mile front. The Légion was bearing the brunt of it, in its sectors. The difficulty always was the retreat back to camp, the *décrochage* or "unhooking," as the French termed it. The Riffians always gave back before a determined charge; they were equally persistent in following up a retreat, and then was when most casualties occurred. Yet you could not hold a relieved *poste;* there were not men enough in the line for a general advance as yet.

Two miles of marching up a silent valley, while the gun whanged out its shells high overhead. There might not have been a tribesman opposing them in the world, for all any Riff snipers were heard from. And then, directly before them, loomed up an exceedingly steep and ugly mountain, all rocks and precipices and crowned with Poste Tafrant on its summit. "What ho!" crowed the Honorable Jeff from the ranks. "Climb the jolly old thing, Top, what?"

His eagerness was contagious, but only the sergeants' whistles answered him. Grimly the Légion deployed, platoon by platoon, a long line of khaki-clad men, with tin helmets replacing their visored kepis, swarming up the steep slopes of brush. They were bulgy with grenade-bags, and the Honorable Jeff strained at his load like an eager dog, rifle strapped on back. "Cheerio! I mean, easy does it, what?" Ike heard him yelp encouragement to the laggards.

"Silence in the ranks, children of sin!" Lieutenant Hortet in the rear called out gruffly, as jocular curses in a dozen languages answered the *bleu.* "Is it that the Riff will hear and stop the blabbers with bullets, *morbleu?*"

Silence; up a thousand feet more climbed the Légion. The valley lay far below now,

with a network of small streams, cameltracks for roads. An impassable country for artillery until the Légion could build the roads! They came to where the slopes were almost perpendicular basalt and the battle line seized bushes and outcroppings, became a trickle of men ascending various crevices and chimneys. A pause, up near the top, to reform the line. The slopes were less steep here, but beyond them lay the Riff trenches. Then the crest, and Jeff was the first to fire his rifle. A domed-turban head rose out of a trench and fell on the wire with fluttering burnous.

"*Shoo*-ting!" yelped Jeff, much encouraged. A flock of return bullets buzzed by him as he waved the rifle recklessly. Hell's Angels Squad listened hopefully for the smack of one downing him, but had no luck. Then the bugles blew the charge, and the whole line advanced. The Riffians met them with a heavy fire poured from the trench. Men stumbled and fell, but on rushed the line, firing at will. Ike kept Jeff with him. It would be cold steel, in another moment, and Hell's Angels would be in the thick of it. Jeff didn't know a thing about that sort of rough-stuff; the girl would never forgive him if he let her boy get a yataghan-slash that crippled him for life!

But the Riffians did not wait. They drained out of the trenches ahead of that charge and retreated around the fort walls. Ike found himself leading a swirl of Légionnaires around a corner—Hell's Angels Squad, mostly—and then they all saw the gun-emplacement. It rose just beyond the old parade ground of the *poste,* and all the plateau to it was bullet-swept from snipers in the boulders beyond. Ike tried to halt the squad—as a mass of burnouses in the redoubt were hurriedly swinging the gun on them—but just then Jeff fired again, and a number of them collapsed in a heap with that single bullet and there was confusion.

"Pinko! There you are, old onion!" yelped Jeff encouragingly. "Crash into those Johnnies, what?"

IT was a perfectly asinine thing to do—charge that redoubt without any definite idea on how they were ever going to get out of it again, but Ike was swept along by Jeff's contagion, and besides there was a fat chance for his wound, now—and they made it in a rush and hoisted the Riff out on their bayonets. There was a breathing spell, during which Ike looked around to see who had stuck with him. Jeff, still unhurt; Hortet, who had no business with Hell's Angels Squad at all; Criswell; Anzac Bill; Rosskoff; "Mr. Dee" the Italian count. Seven men, all more or less touched with cuts and bullet-wounds; and just outside the walls raged a horde of Riffians bent on getting that gun back at any price. The rifles raved and chattered for a few minutes as the Riffians swept in a mob around the redoubt; then grenades cleared a space.

"Priceless!" cheered the Honorable Jeff happily. "Dog-fight, what? I mean, bomb-and-bayonet sort of thing, if we're ever goin' to get back, don't you know. Cawn't we turn the jolly old gun into 'em somehow? The Lancers had one, taken from the Hun Johnnies. Curio, what? But I made it my business to learn how they worked the bally thing."

He examined the German gun, seemed to know just how to release its firing latch. The breech swung open. They put a shell in, swung the gun, and blew hell out of the massed Riff, who promptly sought cover in the rocks.

"Little bit of all right, that!" commented the Honorable Jeff and picked up his rifle again. Ike looked back at the fort. The Algerian tirailleurs had swung open its splintered main gate and removed sandbags enough behind it to let the Légion battalion in. Up on a watch-tower a signal man was waving flags at them, and beside him stood an extremely mad Commandant.

"Wreck that gun and come back, you damn' fools!" the flag said.

"Ol' Knecht, he has a surprisin' knowledge of good English!" admitted Ike as he told his squad the message. "Cayn't be did, bozo!" he apostrophized the furious Commandant. "How many grenades you birds got left?"

They counted the lean bags and mustered a total between them of less than fifty grenades.

"That'll stop three rushes, allowin' two per rush for each man," calculated Ike. "The gun keeps 'em from massin'. . . . . Nope; cayn't make the grade, old-timer!" He turned toward the distant Commandant in the watch-tower and made the no-can-do signal. Indeed, to cross that wind-swept stretch would be fatal for seven men.

"Silly ass, your commandant. I mean, chap get hurt, frightf'lly, if he tries to cut it and run with those rotters potting at

us, what? I move we stay here, Top," said Jeff cheerfully.

"Good place fer it, son!" agreed Ike. "Ain't you *never* goin' to git bumped off?" he complained facetiously.

There was a grim guffaw as the rest of the squad endorsed that. The Légion was worried about him, Jeff was reminded.

"Dash it! Clean forgot the jolly old wound, you chaps!" he said brightly, and looking himself over to see if there *was* one he had overlooked.

"Aint had no luck, so fer!" grinned Ike. "Howsomever, this squad of Hell's Angels is stickin' by ye, son! The gal says you've got to get it good—thinks I, she'd sing another tune ef she'd saw you high-tailin' across that flat—but, nary a tetch!"

"Oh, I *say!*" burst out the Honorable Jeff contritely. "You mean, you chaps were afraid I might get done in completely, so you stuck by me out here?"

"Nope, 'twarn't that exactly," Ike hastened to reassure him, while the rest protested. "A sort of madness gits under a feller's hide when he goes after these hos-styles red-haided. We all gits that. . . . . Only—son, we're in a foolish place, here, and don't ye fergit it!" he said sternly. "It's too late fer any fancy wound. An' that gal wouldn't let me resk ye, nohow! They're too close, get me? Keep yore haid down; an' don't try any funny business!"

JEFF ought to have been quashed under the anxiety that underlay Ike's words, but he wasn't. After one appreciative, "Quite right, Top! Need every man, what?" he took his station at the wall of the redoubt beside Hortet and was eagerly peering through his loophole for signs of the Riff.

"It ees not that you shall have *no* wound, Meestair Jeff," explained the zou-zou. "But you shall not have too much wound, *morbleu!* Ze girl, she weep."

Hortet looked out, silently, but he had said it all for them. It was not often that Ike had heard Hortet's emotions make him forget that act of memory by which the Frenchman conquers the difficult English *th!* The Riffians were preparing another rush. They wanted that gun and its redoubt back at any cost, nor could the fort help Ike much. Low calls of *"Beluk, ya oulad!"* were being passed from boulder to boulder outside, and Ike hissed the warning: *"Attention,* you birds! Grenades; then bayonet!"

AND then they came, a solid ring of burnouses like a huddle of sheep. The .77 fired by Anzac Bill blew a hole in one segment of it; the rest was a leaping ring of fire that stormed through the grenade showers and swept on to the walls in a human wave. A sea of fierce, bearded faces; bayonet against bayonet, for the Riff had them too. But they knew nothing of thrust-and-parry, and presently they discarded that weapon for one they knew, the keen yataghan. Closer they pressed, in a ring of steel. The fort swept away their reinforcements with sustained fire from its ramparts, but Ike and his men had to deal with at least twenty of them who were close under the redoubt wall and were climbing over it with busy swords warding the long rapier-bladed French bayonet. There were Legionary curses as these bodkins bent and twisted with the fall of heavy bodies, growls of longing for the stubby American dagger that cut clean and came away. And then they were over, and the inside of the redoubt became a den of wild beasts.

Ike took to his automatic, Criswell to his fists, Anzac Bill to clubbed musket used like a short-range battering ram with his stocky weight behind it. The yataghans rained on tin helmets, undercut in curved and snaky flashes that meant a man's neck. Men grunted, swore, labored with thrust, cut and blow. Hortet stood defending the Honorable Jeff with a yataghan snatched up out of the mud. The thing sang and whirled in a play of light, for the old zou-zou was an expert with it and could remember when his corps carried them. Jeff was handicapped by a bayonet bent like a fish-hook and about as useless. He was saying nothing, breathing hard, his eyes bulging and scared with all the new sensations of this his first hand-to-hand fight. The Légion was used to it, had an eye to spare for him all the time. They had no breath to say anything, but always there was the quick side-lunge, the bullet from Ike, a smash of Anzac Bill's gun-butt when the battle crowded over Jeff's way.

Jeff himself was busy with an original invention that was embarrassing to the tribesmen—that hooked bayonet, which caught a man's leg and made him easy for Bill or Criswell. A Riffian yell of rage greeted the third man to go down that way. A knot of them, headed by their sheik, lunged for Hortet in a press of bodies to end the nuisance. Ike saw the long stab

Ike saw the long stab of a bayonet, heard the gasping yelp from Jeff—"Got it!"—and saw him stagger against the wall.



of a Spanish bayonet, heard the gasping yelp from Jeff—"Got it!"—and saw him stagger against the wall; then the entire squad had landed on that group of attackers like a bursting shell. It seemed to have loosed superhuman energies in them. Criswell's fists smote like pump-pistons; Ike's automatic blazed out the last of its magazine in a stream; Anzac Bill humped burnouses bodily over the wall as fast as he could lift and heave. The redoubt was cleared in less than ten seconds. Its defenders leaped to the walls and pursued the remnant with rifle-fire. Cheers rang out from the fort. It was over, that attack on the gun, and would not soon be repeated!

IKE turned from his loophole to ask: "Hurted bad, Jeff?" Their *bleu* was leaning against the wall. He was very white, and there was blood on his tunic. A pinched smile writhed on his lips.

"Where's m' rifle?" He attempted a grin at Sergeant Ike and lurched over to where the weapon leaned against the wall. "Bit balmy, what? Things going round, Top. . . . . Be all right in a tic."

Ike gave a look around outside. The Riff had all taken to boulder-concealments. They still surrounded the redoubt on three sides, but would not attempt another rush in any hurry!

"Watch 'em, you birds!" Ike cautioned his squad. "I'm giving him fust-aid."

The Honorable Jeff had collapsed in the mud when Ike got to him. Under his tunic was more blood. A nice, clean, triangular hole was there, directly under the left collar bone. The bayonet had gone clear through, like a rapier-blade. It had touched nothing vital, not even the lung tip.

"Just right, fellers!" Ike announced beatifically to his squad. "She'll think a lot of that there puncture! Aint tore none, neither."

He was applying compresses on both sides while the squad breathed relief and Hortet said piously: "It is the *Bon Dieu!* Name of a hen, I've seen many a good man disemboweled by those yataghans!"

"Only question is, how are we sons goin' to get him outa hyar?" went on Ike, looking up from Jeff's still form. "It's a game kid, this *bleu!* But he's lost a lotta blood, an' they aint goin' to be no ambylance." It *did* look rather a problem to the Légion! The squad could not cross that flat back to the fort, even at a run, let alone carrying a wounded man. Nor could they stay. Knecht's orders were to relieve the garrison, blow up the *poste,* and retreat back to camp. Certainly he would not abandon his seven men in the redoubt; but he could not make a sortie to relieve them, either. He would lose seventy men getting out that front gate in the face of all the Riff fire that would be concentrated on him. The fort was signaling Ike, now, "Mr. Dee' called attention.

"*La décrochage,*" the signalman's flags were saying, while Riff snipers potted at him in his tower. "We abandon fort in half an hour and blow it up. Will make demonstration around left flank of mountain for your relief."

Ike and Hortet conferred. *La décrochage,* the "unhooking," disengagement from contact with the enemy. It was always a ticklish business, for the Riff were quick at following up. Hortet figured that the battalion would clear out over the rear wall; then work around the left flank under the mountain crest and come up with strong battle on the Riff masses to their right. He and Ike sought a loophole that gave a view that way. The mountain slopes fell away sharply there, and there was a grove of Alpine pine below. A tortuous line of bushes running down-hill seemed to indicate the course of a mountain rill. Ike studied it awhile, then said:

"Thar's our baby, Hortet! When she goes up, them Riff'll come a-singin' all over the ruins, leavin' only a corporal's gyuard around th' redoubt. We oozes out, about then, an' dallies a piece with them hostyles, with grenades. Then we humps it down that creek an' jines Knecht."

"*Morbleu!*" growled Hortet. "Unless she has a deep bottom, that creek, she will be a death-trap! We could crawl down it singly, but how carry our *bébe* who has now the nice wound?"

Ike did not know; but just then Jeff came out of his faint and sat up dizzily. "I say, y'know. . . . . Need a bawth, what? Quite filthy, and all that!"

Hortet shook his head sorrowfully. "Still the bathe! He is mad, that-one! *C'est la guerre!*" he sighed resignedly.

THE squad looked at each other. They were grimy and black with powder smoke, sticky with dried blood, hands caked with powder and grease from hard-worked rifle bolts, feet and leggins mired with mud. All of them were bandaged somewhere, and the wounds complaining. They itched and needed a "bawth" themselves, but it could not be helped, for the canteens held all the water they had.

The fort was signaling again. "Demolition," it said laconically. "Look out for yourselves."

They watched it expectantly. Not a kepi showed on the parapets now. The explosion would come within five minutes.

Meanwhile Jeff was getting fretful. This Sergeant Ike saw; so Criswell spared a little water from his canteen to bathe and freshen him up. The Légion watched the silent fort and the surrounding Riff from its loopholes. The tribesmen were calling to each other and advancing in small groups, becoming bolder as no answering fire from the fort stopped them. A crisis would arrive with the demolition of that fort; the chance for this squad to get away —but not without their wounded *bleu,* taken back to his girl nicely punctured! And not in so bad a fight, either. . . . .

Whooom! Rrrrump! With a vast explosion the fort suddenly became a cloud of flying dust and black smoke, its walls falling outward, a shell of wrecked masonry and roofs and beams appearing within through the shooting geyser of red dust. The ground shook and trembled under foot. A rain of heavy stones fell dislodged from the redoubt walls. The squad cowered close under the shower of small pebbles and débris falling out of the sky, their tin hats pattering as under hail. All but Jeff, who had crawled to his feet, was peering through a loophole and was exclaiming excitedly: "I *say!* There's water over yonder!"

He turned appealingly to Ike, who was supporting him now. The latter saw a small shining pool out there among the rocks behind the Riff position, a little waterfall above it. That line of bushes running downhill *did* mask a brook! Ike looked at it, making up his mind. It was now or never, for the Riff were charging forward toward the ruins in dense masses and things were thinning out rapidly here. Presently they would come back and overwhelm the redoubt in a horde. And, curiously, the brook had no bushes below its pool, just a sharp edge that argued another waterfall and a crevasse of some sort, with trench-like walls.

It gave Ike the deciding hope. "What say, Looie?" he asked Hortet. "The brook looks sunk to me—sorter coulee-like."

Hortet looked, and his military eye grabbed the chance. Anything that looked the least practical was good enough for Hortet! "*En avant,* Sergeant!" he ordered.

"All right. Le's go!—Clear the way, Hell's Angels!" yelped Ike, and over the redoubt they went, preceded by a flock of grenades. Ike wrecked the firing-latch of the .77 with a rock as he left, then picked up Jeff and followed. He saw the squad ahead leaping like goats over the boulders

and leaving a number of peaceful Riffians behind, caught up with them in long bounds, reached the brink of the brook. It was a drop of six feet down between its walls of ragged limestone, and into it the squad vanished. They did not wait to give Jeff his longed-for "bawth," but toted him downstream at full speed, bullets plunging wildly through the bushes overhead.

Their limestone protection swiftly lowered as the crevice wound and twisted downhill. Backs humped lower, for it was hot with bullet-stabs just above—they were finally dragging Jeff head-and-feet over the brook bed. Yells, shouts, shots, sounded all around them, now and then the thrust of a bayonet through brush; but like rabbits in a runway they scuttled on down. Then Hortet stopped. The squad was crouched, almost prone, in a little pool overhung with dense thicket. And down below was the grove of pines, with two acres of open ground between them and it. And that open ground was swarming with Riff in their usual mob-like line of battle.

They were firing at will into the grove. And then, through it, from tree to tree, Ike saw advancing a long line of mixed Légion and Tirailleurs, the red fezzes of the latter making notes of flaming color in the greenery. They were volleying as they came—Knecht's flank movement around the mountain to their relief.

Hortet gave the word. "All magazines loaded? *Eh bien!* Charge, my infants!"

They burst out into the rear of those Riff, in a wedge of men exploding rapid-fire and having Ike in their midst. He lugged Jeff with one arm over shoulder and his automatic busy in the free hand. They cleared a swath of deceased Riffians in the path of their advance and heard Knecht's joyful bellow of greeting from the pines: "*Hola!* My *zephyrs!* My *joyeuses!* My pigs! The little sixty-pound sack of sand for the lot of you!" he was shouting. It was French invective of the vilest, for a *zephyr* is a thief, a *joyeuse* unprintable, and a pig the insult of insults to the Gallic mind. Also the *plut*, that sixty-pound sack of sand on one's back, was nothing to tote around with pleasure in the hot sun, hour after hour!

However, he was glad to see them back, and more so when Ike deposited his burden and asked for the medical sergeant.

"*Tiens!* He's got his wound, that *bleu?*" said the big commandant with interest. "*Eh bien!* It is not one that will make the Lady Diana to faint away, I hope?"

"Nawsir," Ike grinned. "We saved nigh all of him. Jest a tetch with one of them Riff hair-pins—and he'll make a fust-class fightin' man, Commandant! Hell's Angels want him back in the squad, they says."

It was a pretty good recommendation, coming from that particular squad; and the Commandant said, "Hum! We shall see, my cowboy! He is of the *élite*, you comprehend; and there will be influence brought to bear to get his release, but—he is not yet a soldier *habile*, you said?"

"About thataway, Commandant! One leetle scrap aint nothin'—if I'm not mistook in that gal."

IKE was right. Two weeks later the Hell's Angels squad were sent for, to report at the hospital in Fes el Bali. They dolled up considerable, for rumor had it that She had come down from England and was nursing him. Ike led the squad down the corridor. A tall girl rose from beside Jeff's cot to greet him. One look at her and Ike was gone, the whole squad! Cool gray eyes, regal in their centuries of breeding, smiled on him with understanding comradeship. She knew real men when she saw them; would tolerate no others about her! She included them all in one gracious sweep of her glance and said to Ike, in a rich, throaty voice: "They tell me you are an American cowboy, Sergeant. I've always wanted to know one. Our sort, y'know." She was extending a firm hand that knew tennis racquets and polo mallets.

"Yes, *ma'am!* Texas Ike was my handle, back in the good ole days," said Ike, his searching gaze on her. Yes, she was all right, true-blue! There wasn't going to be any funny business about that wound; no snaking him out of the Légion just as soon as he'd got a little touch: "How's Jeff, ma'am?" he asked. "Comin' back to the squad right soon?"

"Oh, rather!" said the girl. "You'll have him within the week, Sergeant!"

"For five years, ma'am?" grinned Ike quizzically.

The girl flushed; then met his eyes merrily. "Not quite that, perhaps! But I want him a thorough soldier, Sergeant. You'll look after him, wont you? And I want to thank you all—Hell's Angels squad, isn't it? priceless name!—for bringing him out of that redoubt!" she said, her eyes grateful upon them all.

The squad bowed, grinned, protested that it was nothing, and Ike took occasion to introduce them all—grizzled old Hortet, whose wounds were an epic of the Army of Africa; Criswell, the burly, who was so tough that dynamite made no impression on his hide; "Mr. Dee," who was a Wop count when back in Italy; and Anzac Bill, who took frenzied Arabs all apart with his Australian stock-whip.

"Old home week, what?" said Jeff cheerily from his cot, while Lady Diana laughed consumedly over Ike's introductions, "Be with you chaps in a tic. Silly old war! —But a chap can see a bit of service, what?"

"An' he'll make a fust-class fightin' man, ma'am, when we gits through a-trainin' of him," added Ike, assuring her cordially. "He'll be wuth somethin' when he gits inter that dude London regiment, I'm settin' here to tell you!"

"Quite!" smiled the girl mirthfully. "I'm relying on you, Hell's Angels!" She included them all, somehow, in her confident nod, and Hortet, who with the Frenchman's tact knew just when to go, started the squad moving with polite adieus. Ike was the last.

A short distance from the cot the girl caught up to him, was detaining him with hand on his uniform sleeve.

"Wear this for me, Sergeant!" she said in her low and musical voice, her eyes on him like burning stars.

She was gone, with a friendly pat on the arm, back to the cot. Ike stared at the thing in his palm with tinglings of emotion. Chivalry! It was not gone yet from the world! It lingered here, in these old families who cherished its traditions down the generations. Her token was a small platinum brooch-pin with a big solitaire diamond in it—and was a gesture the like of which is not often seen in these days of greed. Ladies of rank did that, in the brave old days of the knights; not often now! But she was that kind. . . . .

Ike fastened the pin carefully under his tunic-flap, over his heart. It was not a special reward because he had carried the wounded Jeff out of the redoubt for her; it was a token of understanding between them. . . . . Good kids! They needed the old war-dog around, while her boy was getting his training in that school of continuous war, the Foreign Legion!

Another fine story of the Foreign Legion by Warren Hastings Miller will appear in an early issue.

Why All the Howling?

By

Dick Wick Hall

Hot and extra dry—that's how Mr. Hall describes Yumaresque County, Arizona. And that's how we should describe his strange chronicle.

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

DOGS has sure got some kind of a Sixth Sense or Seventh Dimension, so that any old kind of a cur dog can give you awe-inspiring information—if you've got the Nerve to listen to him—and tell you in advance when you ought to be sending for the Undertaker instead of the Doctor. I don't pretend to know how they do it, but they sure Can—like there's lots of other things in this old world that you don't know How, but that Are just the same. Maybe some kind of invisible Notification Committee tells them.

Moreover, there's three kinds of Folks in this world—Folks that have got sense enough to know that Dogs Know—Folks that almost believe that Dogs Know, but are half ashamed to admit it—and just ordinary Ignorant Folks that Don't Know and wont ever admit that a Dog Knows More than they do. I'm one of the first kind. Old Grouchy Bill Thorpe was one of the last variety who didn't believe nobody or nothing—but he's graduated now, and is one of the first kind. How Come was this way:

Chloride Jack, my partner, had gone up to Prescott to cool off and try and soak up a little Moisture, inside and out, and me and Dooley was prospecting around over in Tank Pass and camped at Indian Springs, resting and trying to find the Lost Squaw Mine. Dooley is Chloride Jack's bulldog, and was a good dog and good company, not wanting to talk all the time



I've seen lots of scared folks in my life, but nobody any scareder than we were when Dooley came into the shack that morning.

like some Folks I know, when you don't feel like answering, so we got along fine.

Everything was going jake with me and Dooley, until one evening old Grouchy Bill Thorpe come along with his Burros and says as he is on his way to town to get some Grub and go over in the Big Horns to do his assessment work on the Black Bonanza. When he smelled the Mountain Sheep cooking, he says it is getting pretty late to get to town that night and he guessed he would stop overnight with us and rest up.

We was setting there all comfortable, leaning up against a big boulder, me and Dooley listening and old Grouchy Bill doing all the talking, Complaining about this and that and everything in general and not satisfied with Nothing, when all of a sudden Dooley whimpers a little and gets up and looks at old Bill and backs off and commenced to act kind of funny and Nervous-like and trotted out in front of us a ways and give a few kind of scary Growls, like maybe there was some varmint around, only different—and then he set down and looked at us again and stuck his nose up into the air and let loose a Wail that was a Hum Dinger, echoing back and forth up the Cañon and against the hills around. No matter whether Dooley was praying or begging, he always done his Damndest.

Old Grouchy Bill likes to hear himself Talk better than anybody or anything and don't like nobody to interrupt him—but this is one time he stopped to Listen, right in the middle of what he was saying, and wanted to know what in hell was the matter with that Dog, acting that way. I told him what it was and how Dogs can Always Tell when somebody is going to Die, which old Bill says is just plumb Foolishness and no sense—and how could Dooley, away out there at Indian Springs with nobody there but me and him, tell anything about Somebody dying somewhere—which shows how much Bill didn't know.

I edged away from old Bill a little because I didn't like the way Dooley was a-looking at him when he howled, and being as there was Plenty of Room out there, there wasn't no use in taking no chances on getting the Notification Committee mixed up as to who they was after by me staying too close to old Bill. Bill wanted to argue about it, but I told him there wasn't no Argument coming when Dooley howled like that, because it was a cinch

somebody was going to Die, even if he didn't believe it.

One word led to another, and Bill commenced to get Personal, and just then Dooley let loose a Bad One—which I knew meant that either me or old Bill was going to Die pretty *pronto*—and I didn't start the argument, and I wasn't ready to die yet. So I killed old Bill in self-defense and the middle of what he was trying to say, just to prove to him that Dooley was Right and knew what he was Howling about. I couldn't very well let him make Dooley out a Liar, after me giving him such a good reputation on his howling.

Well, me being the Justice of the Peace and ex-officio Coroner of this little corner of Hell and Yumaresque County, Arizona, I had to hold a Inquest over old Bill, to make it Legal, so I brought in a Verdict of unusual circumstantial Suicide, brought on by useless argumentation as regards invisible and unseen manifestations of an inscrutable Providence et cetera; exonerating Dooley and vindicating myself on the grounds of self-defense—and went to bed.

I buried old Grouchy Bill the next morning, up alongside of a big Granite boulder, and piled a lot of Rocks on top of him so as the coyotes couldn't bother him, and then I made out my bill for $37.45 for legal services and fees and expenses, all according to the Laws and Statutes of Yumaresque County and the State of Arizona, as set down in the Book, and sent it in to the County Seat to get my money, which the Super Visors down there don't ever question, because they like to keep on good terms with us up in this end of the county and get our votes every two years.

WHEN Chloride Jack come back to the Desert from Prescott, and found out what I had done, he said it didn't pay to be so quick-tempered, and I had ought to of waited until old Bob had got his assessment work done first. Seeing as I hadn't, it was up to us now to do the assessment work for old Bob, or else relocate the claims in our own name, being as they was supposed to be pretty good ones and no good to old Bob no more.

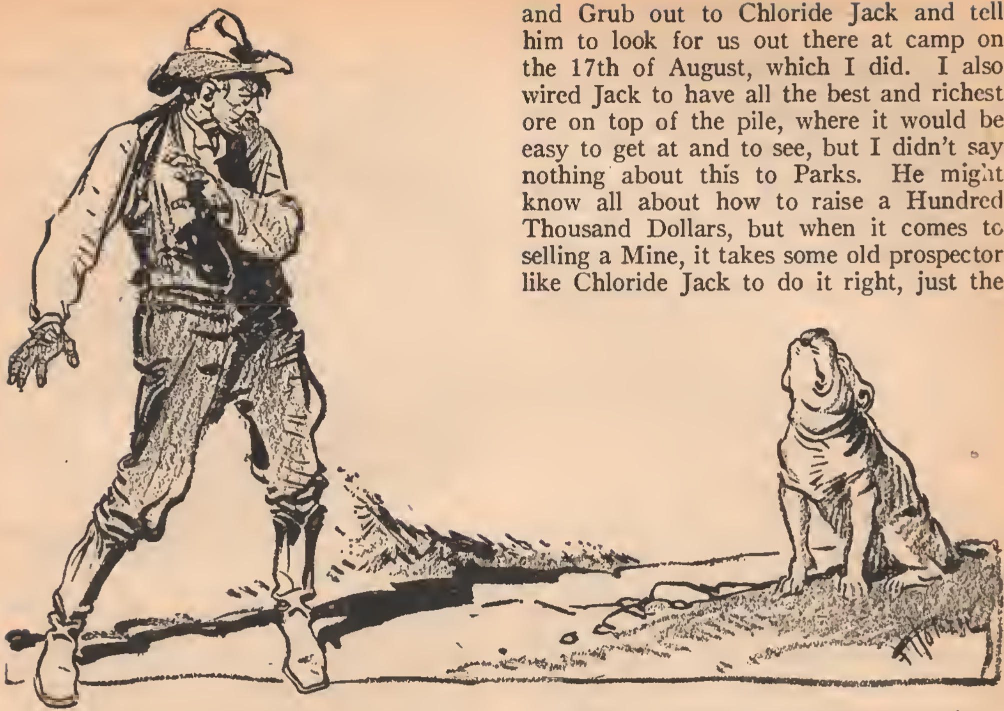
We talked it all over and thought it wouldn't look so good for me to relocate the claims in my name, on account of somebody might think I had killed old Bob a purpose to get the Black Bonanza, so I decided the best thing to do was for Chloride Jack to relocate them and Do the Work and we would divide the profits, being pardners. Chloride Jack is a Good Pardner, strong in the back but not very good at figuring, and I have got a Weak Back when it comes to Hard Work; so I wrote out the Location Notices and we went out to the Big Horns and relocated the claims in Jack's name on July 1st, when the assessment time run out.

The claims was away to Hell and gone from anywhere, forty-five miles from Hydersburg on the Hassayamp, and twenty-seven miles out across the Desert from the Vulture mine, which was the nearest place to them. It sure was some Dry and Lonesome place, but there was a good showing of gold and copper ore where old Bob had done his work, so we relocated all the claims and called it the Lucky Dog mine, and took some samples and beat it back for town again on account of not having brought much water with us.

We bought some grub and stuff and I got Limpy Joe at the corral in Hydersburg to haul Chloride Jack and the grub and a load of water out to the Lucky Dog, so as he could get the location work done before the ninety days the law allows run out. While we was getting the stuff together, a Pittsburgh man who was stopping at the Hotel saw some of the samples and we told him about how it looked and he said he thought it was just what he was looking for, so we took Parks, which was his name, out to see the Lucky Dog. He liked it fine when he saw it, and said if we would go back to Pittsburgh with him he had some friends there who would go in with him and give us a Hundred Thousand Dollars for the Lucky Dog, if we would give him Twenty-five Per Cent of it for making the Deal. We would have give him Fifty Per Cent if he had asked it, which is just another example of how it always pays to let the other man do the talking first.

Pittsburgh sounded like a long ways off, and Chloride Jack said he had just got back from Prescott and would rather stay and do the location work than make another trip and get all tired out again, but Parks said he had to have some one go with him who knew more about the mine and could help him close the deal, so the upshot of it all was that we drove back to Hydersburg with Limpy Joe; and Chloride Jack made out a paper, or rather Parks made it out and Jack signed it, called a Power of Attorney, giving me the

and Grub out to Chloride Jack and tell him to look for us out there at camp on the 17th of August, which I did. I also wired Jack to have all the best and richest ore on top of the pile, where it would be easy to get at and to see, but I didn't say nothing about this to Parks. He might know all about how to raise a Hundred Thousand Dollars, but when it comes to selling a Mine, it takes some old prospector like Chloride Jack to do it right, just the same as some of these fruit farmers can put three Big Straw Berries on top of the box and make them cover up a hundred little ones in the bottom. I've seen old Chloride Jack going out to show somebody a prospect and he would stick some Rich Ore in his pocket and walk along the trail and reach down like he was picking something up and keep handing rich samples to the Tenderfoot until they was ready to swear the Whole Mountain was full of Gold, and couldn't get back to town to sign the papers quick enough.



Dooley set down and stuck his nose up in the air and give a Death Wail, which made the Cold Chills chase each other up and down my back.

right to represent Chloride Jack and sell the Lucky Dog Mine and take the money. And me and Parks went to Pittsburgh, and Jack went back to the mine to do the location work. Parks promised Jack we would be back with the money inside of three weeks, barring accidents.

Pittsburgh is on a river, just like Hydersburg is on the Hassayamp, but outside of that they are altogether different—and I would rather live in Hydersburg—not that Pittsburgh aint a good town or Parks wasn't nice to me, because he sure put himself out a lot to treat me fine, but I got so tired of eating fancy grub and stuff I didn't know what it was that I would have give Forty Dollars for a mess of Flap Jacks and Frijole Beans like Chloride Jack can cook them.

Prying a Hundred Thousand Dollars loose from anybody takes time, even in Pittsburgh, and with a go-getter like Parks trying to do it for Twenty-five Per Cent, and three weeks was gone before we knew it. I told Parks that Chloride Jack was expecting of us back there and maybe he might be getting pretty Dry out at the Lucky Dog, Forty-five miles from any Water except what Limpy Joe had hauled out to him in barrels, so he talked it over with some of his people and said we would go back in ten days more and take an engineer with us, and for me to telegraph Limpy Joe to take another load of Water

Well, Parks finally got his folks together, and they agreed to buy the Lucky Dog for a Hundred Thousand Dollars, provided their Expert reported favorable on it, which was the best we was able to do. So we agreed to it, and drew up a thirty-day option, and I signed it, and we all started home again, me and Parks and Mr. Houlihan, their Mining Expert. We had fussed around so much and wasted so much time waiting on each other that it was the night of the 15th of August before we left Pittsburgh, and we got held up twice by wrecks along the road, so that it was the 20th when we got to Hydersburg.

The 20th of August at Hydersburg on the Hassayamp is always Hot and Dry, and this year was no exception, only more

so. We got in a little after noon, and Limpy Joe met us at the depot and took us to the Hotel, and then he asked me to come down to the corral and take a look at Dooley, which he didn't like the way he was acting. He said Chloride Jack had asked him to bring Dooley to town with him the last trip he had been out there, on account of Water being so scarce out there and nothing much for Dooley to eat, so he had brought Dooley in and been keeping him at the corral, but the last two days he had been acting up like maybe he had the Hydrophobia, and everybody was scared of him.

I WENT down to the corral with Limpy Joe, and Dooley was tickled to death to see me, but when he had jumped all over me for a while, he set down and stuck his nose up in the air and give a Death Wail, which made the Cold Chills chase each other up and down my back, even if it was the 20th day of August and a tolerable warm Arizona summer's day. Limpy Joe, who aint supposed to be afraid of nobody, grabbed a pitchfork and backed off in the corner when Dooley commenced to howl, which I can't say as I blame him much. I knew right away, as soon as I heard Dooley Howl, that something was wrong with Chloride Jack out at the mine—maybe snake-bit or blowed up with dynamite or out of water; so I told Limpy Joe to hook up the buckboard to take us out to the Lucky Dog right away, and to start somebody else out to the mine at once with a light wagon and two or three barrels of water, for us and the horses, and Chloride Jack, if he was lucky enough to be alive when we got there.

Parks and Houlihan kicked about starting out in the heat of the afternoon that way and wanted to wait until morning, but I told them we was three days late already, and maybe Chloride Jack dying of thirst out there forty-five miles from town, and anyway, I knew something was wrong the way Dooley was acting, and we was going to go, and that settled it. By the time Limpy Joe had got the buckboard hooked up and a couple of water-kegs on, we had our stuff together and was ready to go, me and Limpy Joe on the front seat, with Dooley in between my legs, and Parks and Houlihan on the back seat, and our bed-rolls and stuff roped on the back end of the buckboard.

Dooley kept acting up and whining and shaking kind of nervous-like, which made Limpy Joe pretty nervous too, but he kept the team hiking along lively in spite of the heat, and we made the Vulture Mine, eighteen miles out, in less than three hours, which was good time over that kind of a road through the foothills, considering the load we had on. It was too early for supper yet, but the team was pretty tired, and a long ways to go yet, and this was the last chance to feed and water, so Joe says we had better stop to eat, and he will let the team cool off, water and feed them, and start on again in the cool of the evening.

Nigger Bob was cooking at the Vulture Mine then, one of these big fat sulky-looking boys, and he didn't show much interest in the idea of getting us something to eat ahead of time, until Parks slipped him a Five-Dollar bill, and then he bust himself getting busy. Limpy Joe took the team down to the corral, and the rest of us set in the shade of one of the camp buildings while Bob was getting our supper ready. Dooley was getting more restless all the time, and every once in awhile he would turn loose a howl that was creepy enough to make almost anybody nervous. I had to keep hold of his collar all the time, for fear he would bite somebody or get loose and start across the desert and get lost. Parks and Houlihan didn't like it very well, bringing Dooley along with us, and they said he was sure coming down with hydrophobia and had ought to be killed. I told them there wasn't nothing the matter with Dooley excepting he was unusually smart and had the Sixth Sense, and when he howled that way he was just trying to tell us that somebody was dead or going to die, which they said was all nonsense, and for me not to let loose of his collar even if he did have Six Senses.

THE Vulture Mine sets out on top of a low flat hill and was first worked about forty years ago, when they took out about Fifteen Million Dollars in Gold, during the Indian days. The old workings have all caved in now, and left a big open pit about a hundred feet deep and two or three hundred feet across, the sides being loose rock which slope off toward the middle, where there was a deep hole connecting up with some of the old lower workings. The cook tent was pitched with the back end close to the big pit, to make it handy for getting rid of the empty tin cans and waste from the kitchen. About ten feet in front of the

cook tent was the dining-room, just another big tent with a table and benches on both sides to set on. A canvas was stretched over the open space in between the two tents, to keep it cool and shady and let the breeze through.

The first time Dooley howled, Nigger Bob came out into the areaway between the two tents, with a big butcher knife in his hand and his two big white eyes popping out, wanting to know what all was the matter with that dog. Parks told him there wasn't nothing the matter with Dooley, excepting he was a little sick, and they thought maybe he was coming down with hydrophobia, on account of the heat—and we pretty near lost our supper right then. Old Bob said he wouldn't stay inside no tent and cook no supper for nobody, not with no hydrophobia dog setting outside howling at him. Dooley howled some more, and the rest of them sided in with old Bob, being afraid of Dooley themselves, and in order to get any supper, I had to take Dooley down to the corral and tie him up to the wheel of a big freight-wagon. The only rope I could find was an old hemp hawser about an inch thick, big enough to hold an elephant, it looked like.

Old Bob finally called us in to supper, and we all went in the tent to eat, canned soup and canned corned-beef hash and fried potatoes, and for dessert he had gone and cooked us a big chocolate cake, which sure tasted good along with canned peaches. We were just getting started on our peaches and cake, and Nigger Bob was carrying the dirty dishes out into the kitchen tent, when all of a sudden Dooley gave a big howl in between the two tents, right behind Bob with an armful of dishes. I never did find out how that chocolate cake tasted!

Old Bob scattered dishes all over the top of that hill, and we all jumped up and run out of the dining-room tent just in time to see Bob going through the kitchen tent, with Dooley snapping at his heels, and just as Bob got to the end of the tent, Dooley went in between his legs, and Bob turned a summer salt, and started back toward us again and Dooley after him, his mouth all bloody, and snapping and growling like he sure enough did have something or was going to get it pretty quick. Everybody was excited and run in every direction, and I think old Bob was so scared he was blind, because he went right out through the side of the tent without stopping to go through the door, which was closer to him.



With Dooley snapping at his heels, Bob went right out through the side of the tent without stopping to go through the door, which was closer to him.

I had run out of the tent and around the corner, trying to get hold of Dooley by the collar to quiet him down, but he was too fast for me, and just as I got out there where Nigger Bob and Dooley was, up by the edge of the pit, Parks pulled out his

automatic and shot Dooley, right between the eyes. I grabbed Parks' gun, but it was too late then. Dooley just kind of wilted down and shook once or twice and rolled over the edge of the big pit before I had a chance to grab him. I don't think he ever kicked as he rolled over and over, down over the loose rocks and into the big hole a hundred feet below. I would like to have got him, on Chloride Jack's account; but Sanford, the boss of the mine, said nobody had ever been down there for years, and the only way to get to him would be to go down the old incline shaft and around through the old workings back in under the cave, and maybe be able to get to the bottom of the big pit that way, which he doubted. I didn't think it was much use, because I was commencing to think by this time that probably Chloride Jack was dead too, out at the Lucky Dog, and that was what was the matter with Dooley.

I gave Parks hell for shooting Dooley, which was a waste of time with him dead now, but it eased my feelings a little, and we went down to the corral to get on our way again. I went over to the freight-wagon where I had tied Dooley, to see how come he had got loose. He had bit the big rope in two just as clean as if it was cut with a knife, which shows how bad he wanted to get somewhere.

IT'S twenty-seven miles from the Vulture to the Lucky Dog, out through some low hills and across a big desert valley, all covered with cactus and greasewood and mesquite trees and *palo verdes*, which you wouldn't believe so many of them could grow where it was so dry for months and months at a time.

We passed the water wagon just in the edge of the hills. Limpy Joe had put four horses on and told the driver to beat it for all he was worth, and he had passed us while we were waiting for supper at the Vulture.

It was kind of hazy moonlight that night, not enough to see very good, but just enough to make you want to see more. We argued a good deal about dogs as we drove along, and whether there was anything to it or not, that they could tell when anybody was going to die, and howl about it and had some sort of a Sixth Sense that made it so as they could see ghosts, etc. Parks and Houlihan didn't take no stock in it, but me and Limpy Joe knew it was so and told about different cases we had known of, where dogs had howled and gave a death wail when somebody was going to die. I told them about the time Dooley had howled before and how old Grouchy Bob Thorpe had died, but Houlihan said that was just circumstantial evidence and didn't count scientifically.

We were driving along through the greasewood about midnight, all of us kind of sleepy and tired, and all of a sudden something howled out in the brush alongside of the road, the same kind of a howl that Dooley had give that afternoon. The horses snorted and stopped short, and we all sat up and shivered a little, and looked and tried to see if we could see anything; and just then it howled again, right behind us this time, and Limpy Joe pointed out in the brush and cried out, "What the hell you call that, huh?" and we all looked, and there was something white out there, moving fast and circling around us like a big bird, only it was on the ground or else so close to it you couldn't tell whether it was running or flying, but it looked to me like it moved too fast for any animal I know of. Just how big it was I wouldn't want to say, but I think it was as big as a dog, but not so big as an elephant. I don't know.

Limpy Joe grabbed the whip and hit the horses, which acted that scared of it they didn't need no urging, and Parks emptied his automatic at it, and we made good time the next few miles. The idea of anybody shooting at a thing like that, as if they could hurt it if they did hit it!

About two o'clock we got to the Lucky Dog camp and I never was so glad to get somewhere in my life. We drove up to the shack and hollered to Chloride Jack, and then we hollered again, but nobody answered, so we got out.

Nobody said nothing, but everybody was awful quiet and doing a lot of thinking. Limpy Joe opened the door and hollered in, and then turned around and said: "Jack, he's gone to hell, I guess."

I went in and scratched a match and lit the candle that was stuck in an old beer-bottle on the table, and then the rest of them come in. Chloride Jack wasn't there, no mistake about that; but everything else was. His gun was standing in the corner, and his bedding was all on the bunk just the way he had left it when he had got up the last time, whenever that was, which there was no way of us telling. The dishes was on the table unwashed, with some bread crumbs and syrup all dried up on

the plate. It looked pretty serious—and even Houlihan, our expert, didn't have nothing to say when I said that Dooley knew what he was doing when he howled. There was just a little water left in one of the barrels, but Jack's canteen was gone, from which I figured out that either Jack had started out to work some day and had an accident, or else his water had run low and he had started to town, in which case something must have happened also, because I knew Jack could easy make it to the Vulture mine on a canteen of water.

We built a big brush fire so as Jack would see it and know we was out looking for him, if he was alive yet, and then we started out in different directions, hollering and yelling and going around to the different location holes, up and down the little cañons and over the foothills for half a mile or more from camp, wherever we thought Jack might have gone. We found the places where he had been working, but no sign or sound of Chloride Jack. All the rest of the night we hollered and hunted, and just about the time the sky commenced to lighten up a little in the east, we got back to camp again and compared notes. Everybody was tired and worn out, and we decided the best thing to do was to cook breakfast, and as soon as it got good and daylight, to start out again and see if we couldn't find Jack's body, which must be somewhere around, even if he was dead.

LIMPY JOE built a fire and put the coffee-pot on, and was just slicing some bacon when Parks jumped up and run in the shack and come out with Jack's rifle.

"Watch me get that coyote," he says, pointing down the road where it come winding around a little hill up toward camp, and he threw the lever down and started to aim at something.

We all jumped up and looked where he was pointing; and sure enough, there was something brownish gray about a hundred yards down the road; you couldn't hardly make out in the half light what it was.

I knocked Parks' gun up just in time or he would have probably killed it. When the gun roared, what Parks had thought was a coyote jumped up and waved its arms, and we saw that it was a man. He staggered a little and fell down again, and we all run down there. And it was Chloride Jack, or what was left of him, his face all scratched up and bloody, and his clothes about all torn off of him.

We packed him back to camp and give him a little water, and washed his face off, and poured a good shot of whisky into a cup of coffee and made him drink that. Houlihan took his shoes and clothes off and put him to bed, and give him another drink, and pretty soon he perked up some and was able to talk. All of us was asking him questions at once.

Jack asked Parks for a cigarette and got it lit, and then he told us his story. He says he had looked for us on the 17th as we had wired, and we hadn't come, so he had waited for us, and the water kept getting lower and we hadn't come; so the night before last he had decided he would wait until the next afternoon, and then if we didn't come he would walk to town and wait for us there.

He had waited for us all day yesterday, he said, and no sign of us, so he had got an early supper and filled his canteen and figured on starting out about sundown and making the twenty-seven miles to the Vulture that night and getting a ride from there to Hydersburg the next day. Jack says he had got all ready and was setting outside in the shade, smoking a cigarette and settling his supper a little before starting, when he noticed something white coming up the road about a quarter of a mile from camp. It had gone out of sight around a curve, and he waited awhile, and then he took his canteen and started down to meet it, which he did, just around the curve. It was Dooley, all over blood, he said, staggering up the road. He run to meet him and called him, and Dooley started back down the road, with him after him, calling and yelling to him and trying to catch up with him.

We just sat and looked at each other when Chloride Jack told us this, everybody waiting for somebody else to say something first. Jack just lay there and didn't say nothing for a while, and then he asked for a drink, and Parks gave him another shot, and then Jack went on with his story again. He says he had chased Dooley way out on the desert, both of them running and him calling to Dooley, and Dooley just whimpering and shaking his head to get the blood out of his eyes, but never letting him catch up with him, and after a while it had got dark and he had run out of wind and got lost and couldn't run no more. He said he had wandered around the desert all night, calling to Dooley, and once in a while Dooley would come and circle around him

and howl, but never let him get close enough to catch him, and along toward morning he had seen our big fire and headed for it, and finally got here and that was all.

We didn't none of us know what to think or say or how to tell Chloride Jack about Dooley being dead, until finally Houlihan says he guess maybe dogs do have Six Senses after all, and I had better tell Jack about what had happened, so I told him how Dooley had gone mad and Parks had killed him. Jack was pretty mad about it, just as I knew he would be, and I thought for a while he was going to crawl on Parks and clean him, but Parks promised to buy him the best dog in Pittsburgh and send him, and he give Jack another drink, and we all agreed not to have no hard feelings over it.

Chloride Jack was feeling pretty good by that time, and he sat up on his bunk and asked for his clothes, to get the makings of a real cigarette, as the tailor-made ones didn't taste so good, he said. He reached in one of the pockets and pulled out a sack of tobacco, and something else fell on the floor. Houlihan reached down and picked it up and looks at it a minute and lays it down on the table, and then he turns around to Chloride Jack, as white as a boiled shirt, and says: "Somebody ought to shoot you for trying to make a monkey out of us like this!"

It was a piece of chocolate cake that had fell out of Jack's pocket. We all looked at it, and Jack just lay on his bunk and laughed, which made all of us pretty mad, because we knew then that Jack had been to the Vulture Mine and got that cake some time during the night, after we had left, and they had told him about Dooley, and it was all a lie about him having seen Dooley and chased him out on the desert.

WHEN Jack got through laughing about how he had fooled us, he told us the truth, how he had left camp the day before, cut across country and got to the Vulture just a little while after we had left there, and how he knew we would all be worried about him when we got to camp and found him gone, so he had to turn right around and walk that twenty-seven miles back again. He said he was pretty sore about us killing Dooley and being three days late and making him do all that walking and worrying, so he thought he would have a little fun with us to get even, and that was how come he had told us the story about chasing Dooley's ghost across the desert. Houlihan didn't like it very well, I could see that.

CHLORIDE JACK had just got through telling us about it when Limpy Joe, who was outside cooking breakfast, gave a screech which just about scared the appetite out of us—but nothing compared to the scare we all got the next second, when something that looked like Dooley come falling in through the door, his head all bloody and his tongue hanging out and looking like the devil himself. I've seen lots of scared folks in my life, including myself, but nobody any scareder than we were when Dooley came into the shack that morning out at the Lucky Dog. I don't just remember what I did, but Parks jumped clear over the table, and Houlihan went through the door and lit in the pan of bacon outside, the first jump. Chloride Jack was the only one that had sense enough to know that it really was Dooley and not no ghost, like the rest of us thought.

Well, Dooley just had a bad scalp wound where Parks had shot him, and the bullet had stunned him and glanced off, and he had evidently come-to down underground, and found his way out through the old workings of the Vulture Mine and come up the old incline shaft and followed our trail out to the Lucky Dog during the night. We washed him off and give him something to eat and drink, and he was about as good as ever. But everybody was tired and nervous and upset, and Houlihan wouldn't hardly look at the mine, and what he did see didn't look good to him, so he said, but I think he was just sore about the way he had acted. Anyway, he turned it down, which is the best thing these experts generally do, and we hooked up the team and started back to Hydersburg.

We got to the Vulture Mine about supper-time, but we didn't get no supper this time. Sanford, the boss, come out and told us we would have to go on in to Hydersburg to get supper because some time during the night before, after we had left, Dooley had come up out of the mine through the old incline and gone up to the cook tent and howled, and old Nigger Bob had come out, and he took just one look at Dooley and dropped over dead.

I wonder maybe dogs do know when somebody is going to die and howl like that to let folks know. *Quien sabe?*



"From these drawings there's little doubt as to the machine's not being suitable. We must decline to go further."

Free Lances in Diplomacy

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

An extraordinary acquaintance with international affairs and the inside workings of foreign governments enables Mr. New again to handle a strange situation most interestingly.

Illustrated by William Molt

WHEN the Gladwin Cabinet went out and Earl Trevor of Dyvnaint, at His Majesty's request, formed a new one with the Right Honorable John Craithness heading it as Premier, the various appointments were admitted by the press to constitute one of the strongest governments in any generation. The Right Honorable Sir Bannington Morford as Secretary of State for War was hailed as a particularly happy choice because of his organizing ability and such of the personnel in the War Office as owed their appointments to him were practically beyond criticism. There are, however, certain executives in every government who do not go out with a falling ministry—their long connection with the office and knowledge of its detail rendering them desirable as "hold-overs" to assist and instruct the new incumbents.

Under Sir Bannington Morford, when he took over his desk in Whitehall, there was the Honorable Patrick Bright, as permanent under-secretary—a dour, unpleasant man who, none the less, had the details of the office well in hand, having occupied his berth during three administrations after the death of his predecessor. As he talked personal matters about as much as the average clam, there were very few who remembered that he had been an inconspicuous Labor Member in the House and had come in when the unsuccessful Labor Cabinet took over the government. Had anything brought the subject up in a way suggesting incompetence upon Bright's

part, Sir Bannington would have recalled this—but the man's record was quite on the other side, and it would have seemed most unlikely that whatever political opinions he happened to hold could interfere, seriously, with the proper functioning of the War Office.

Outside of Windsor and the Cabinet itself, it was not known that Earl Trevor had actually formed the new government, the supposition being that Craithness, according to precedent, had picked out the ministry and then headed it as is almost invariably the case—the control of the Cabinet by Earl Trevor, in the background, being unsuspected by anyone outside of His Majesty, Craithness and the other two "Free-Lance" peers who had been included in it. Bright, as permanent under-secretary, had seen three ministries come and go, keeping whatever prejudices he might have against individuals strictly to himself. In the new Cabinet, however, the three most influential ministers—Earl Trevor, Earl Lammerford and Baron Abdool Mohammed—happened to be his particular aversion, largely from the fact that they were men who invariably got things done in spite of any sort of opposition. As organizers and executives they had few equals in the United Kingdom.

Bright thoroughly approved of the deep rut—doing things in the way established by long usage, whether it was absolutely effective or not. Above all that, he liked to do things in his own way—and, during his incumbency, had built up a stereotyped method of procedure to which everyone under him was compelled to rigidly conform. In the less important matters, it worked well enough, but only his various chiefs knew how many vitally important ones had been handled ineffectually for reasons which they had not understood.

SHORTLY after the new government had come in, Earl Trevor—with the hearty support of the Prime Minister and his two intimate friends—had started to put through a scheme which he had always believed to be a government necessity but which, up to that time, never had been tried out in the thorough manner which was characteristic of His Lordship: this was a reorganization of the Foreign Office Intelligence Department upon up-to-the-minute lines. It had required but a few minutes' explanation of the scheme to enlist fully the support of Sir Austen—the Foreign Secretary who had been the only minister holding over from the previous Cabinet. John Craithness, as Premier, was secretly pledged to support the Earl in any advisable measure, but he had been equally quick to see the great advantage of the scheme to His Majesty's Government.

The Foreign Office had its King's Messengers and Secret Service men in every quarter of the globe—communicating with Downing Street in various codes by cable, radio and telegraph, in addition to wallets and portfolios carried by King's Messengers when it was possible to get across the borders of other countries with them. It was Earl Trevor's idea, however—based upon first-hand knowledge as a radio and aëronautic engineer with several years' experience in broadcasting and receiving—that communications from the governments of various countries were being continually broadcasted in code to their representatives abroad in the form of talks or plays containing code words easily picked out by those for whom they were intended. Such means of communication, of course, was infinitely quicker than any other sort and, when properly coded, apparently safe. What had occurred to His Lordship, however, was that while all of these governments were communicating on their own business, not a single one of them, to the best of his knowledge, had any equipment for systematic listening-in on what was being broadcasted by the others. To do this effectively was a proposition calling for a large amount of detail, at almost prohibitive expense.

Trevor knew that getting an appropriation from Parliament for any such purpose would be difficult, if not impossible—as the preliminary obstacle—and threshing out all the proposed details upon the floor of the House would have meant ruinous publicity as well. There was, however, no difficulty at all in his getting a private license for the erection of one, two or even half a dozen great broadcasting stations—it being understood that he was a scientist, constantly experimenting with valuable discoveries. As long as such experiments were entirely at his own expense, he was usually afforded the facilities he asked for.

Now, to work out a radio-espionage system which effectively covers the entire globe is a proposition which takes some doing—and, while His Lordship never considered the question of expense in whatever



he had set his mind upon carrying out, he was much too able a business man to risk every penny he put in on a chance of having his scheme discredited by a succeeding Cabinet and his equipment scrapped as useless government property. So he figured out a way by which it might be used as a government department while his incumbency lasted, but with the entire equipment remaining his private property, and available for his own great press syndicate if the government discarded it.

HIS first action was to get licenses for two big one-hundred-and-fifty-kilowatt stations—one for reception, in Cornwall, and the other for broadcasting, near the top of Snowdon, in Wales. By employing double the number of workmen the average contractor would have used, and pushing the preparation of his steel, copper and electric material, he had his towers and antennæ ready to commence operation in six weeks, the Snowdon station being a double one—for "beam-transmission" in code—and general broadcasting in all directions.

Meanwhile he purchased four adjoining buildings in the Whitehall neighborhood, deeding over the two end ones to the Foreign Office—which was greatly in need of more room—so that he had government occupancy and protection upon both sides of the two middle buildings, with a wing connecting the two F. O. houses in the

Bright touched a match to the sheet. Earl Trevor should not get any such list!

rear and protecting him on the third side. Under the cellar was an empty sub-cellar—patrolled by guards day and night.

The walls of the two middle buildings were sound-proofed. Twenty small rooms upon the two middle floors had their walls, floors, ceilings, doors, windows and chimneys sound-proofed, and their plumbing wave-trapped. In each of these rooms were placed receiving sets of varying power to cover the broadcasting and wave-length of some particular government station—the smallest, with eight valves (or "tubes," as they are called in the United States) and four hundred volts of "B" power, and the most powerful, of twenty-five water-cooled tubes, using fifteen hundred volts.

There were four of these sets in each room—with six-foot "cones" hanging on the walls above them—and two operatives always on duty, relieved by two others every four hours, night and day. Power was taken from dynamos in the cellar and built up or down to the required voltage in transformers. Each particular set was kept tuned to the one particular wave used by the foreign station it was reproducing and left open all the time—the varying intensities being constantly adjusted by the two operatives when the broadcasting station slipped off its wave or there was static interference.

When the incoming talk upon either of

the four sets appeared to contain something of value to the F. O., one of the operatives took it down in shorthand while the other modulated the remaining three so that they should not distract his attention. In this way constant reception was maintained day and night.

Upon the top floors there were eight rooms equipped with microphones, and receiving sets which could be instantly switched in circuit with any one of the sets upon the two other floors—so that the broadcasting operatives in them could at any moment cut into a talk that was coming through the receiving department and relay the substance of it, in code, to any government station in the British Empire or any other station desired.

The equipment of the buildings in Whitehall had proceeded simultaneously with the erection of the two great broadcasting stations—but the selection of the personnel to handle them was a much more difficult matter. Eighty operatives were required for the receiving department—including the relief-pairs—and thirty-two broadcasters, all of whom must be service men from one branch or another, tested and proved until each individual was beyond suspicion. Each must be physically fit. Each must have at his command at least four languages which he spoke and understood perfectly.

Sir Austen decided that ten could be turned over from the F. O., provided an equal number were appointed from other branches as replacements. To secure the bulk of the number, His Lordship was depending upon the War Office and Admiralty. When he and Craithness put the requisition up to the Right Honorable Clayton Buller, G. C. B., he called for the record-files of his personnel and picked out from the Naval Intelligence department fifty men meeting the requirements. At the War Office, Sir Bannington Morford found thirty-five more in the Military Intelligence department—but couldn't make up the remaining number, with an extra ten for general supervision. He suggested, however, that the list could be completed from demobilized men now in civil life.

MORFORD thereupon sent up to Bright, the permanent under-secretary, for the names and addresses of forty who spoke four languages, were above suspicion, and were now commercially employed in private life. This list was sent down to him in twenty minutes. Sir Bannington then checked it up from the service records in his office—eliminated some whom he admitted were not men he'd recommend for the work—and returned the list to Bright with instructions to communicate at once with each of the remaining ones, asking them to report at the F. O. as soon as possible for a conference with Sir Austen. When the assistant—who was much the same type, and a crony of his—returned with the amended list, Bright saw that eight names placed upon it because they belonged to his own political party had been eliminated by his chief. With inward dissatisfaction, he asked his assistant:

"Who wants these men? What's it for? Why must they speak four languages an' be above suspicion?"

"Well, sir—they're ordered to the Foreign Secretary, d'ye see. But it'll be the Lord Privy Seal who's with Sir Bannington just now, askin' for this list—so I fancy he's got a good bit to do with it, whatever the idea may be."

"Privy Seal! That'll be His Lordship of Dyvnaint—one of the most uncompromisin' Conservatives in the United Kingdom! Aye! He'll be wantin' these men for some dirty spy-business that the F. O.'s up to! There'll come a day when we'll ha' done wi' all that— However, just leave the list on my desk, here, Moffett—it'll have attention when I get to it! That'll be all for the present."

When his assistant had gone out and closed the door, Bright deliberately touched a match to the sheet and tossed it, blazing, into the fireplace. Earl Trevor should not get any such list from the War Office if Bright could prevent it!

Next day, Sir Bannington Morford consulted his physician about a fever he seemed to be running, and was promptly ordered to bed. The Parliamentary under-secretary was in Paris for a fortnight upon a confidential mission for the War Office—which automatically placed it in the temporary charge of Patrick Bright.

The first action of Bright's brief reign—which was later to make trouble out of all proportion to the man or his existence—occurred during the following afternoon. Three days previously, an airplane of peculiar shape—apparently built of some new metal with a dull, silvery gleam—came down upon a private estate in Sussex which had been leased, temporarily, by a man living at one of the London hotels.

This plane was run into a hangar which had been hastily knocked together—the doors securely locked—and a couple of armed watchmen placed outside to prevent any curious person from even seeing the machine. The man who had come down in it, together with the lessee of the estate, had called at the War Office the same day, securing from Sir Bannington an appointment for the seventeenth. When they called, however, the War Secretary was at home in bed, and they were naturally turned over to Bright, who wouldn't have seen them at all had it not been for the appointment with his chief. The fact that they wished to submit a new type of airplane aroused all of his antagonism, as a pacifist and "disarmament-man," and when they had seated themselves near his desk and one of them was untying some blueprints, his manner was curt and decidedly chilling.

"What have you there, gentlemen? I doubt if it will be necess'ry for me to look at your plans. It will be easier to explain your purpose in this interview—in as few words as possible. Sir Bannington's illness has piled up extra work in this office until we've no time for unnecess'ry matters."

THE aviator's half-closed eyes took on the sheen of steel; he had met such impossible subordinates before. His tone, however, was civil.

"Sir Bannington, in explaining that he couldn't give us a proper amount of time, three days ago, expressed a good deal of interest in my plane, nevertheless, and certainly expected to go over it carefully with me. As you are a civilian, Mr. Bright, it is possible that you may not understand mechanical details very well. Would it be permissible, may I ask, to call in one of your military staff officers who does understand them, while we are going over the matter?"

Bright did some quick thinking. He knew that if the plane had been described to Sir Bannington at all he certainly would be interested and fairly sure to ask for details in the matter when he got well. However, the director of military training, Major-General Sir Prosby Smith, was an old-time martinet with the utmost contempt for modern innovations, and could be almost depended upon to "pooh-pooh" anything of this sort submitted to him if it were done as consulting an authority in such matters and with a hint in advance. Bright therefore rang for his assistant and asked him to step around to the General's office with the request that he come in and give his opinion as to the merits of a new American airplane.

Knowing very well what Bright wanted him to say, the assistant put it that the thing was some crazy unworkable bit of junk which a couple of Yankees couldn't sell in their own country and were trying to work off on the British Government—which was quite all the hint the General needed. Deceptively bluff and hearty in manner, he came to Bright's office.

"Well, well, gentlemen—what's this I hear? New type of plane, eh? We fancy we're a good bit ahead of you other chaps in our Royal Air Force—to which we should refer you if your plane seems worth considering at all. But of course we'd best glance at it first. Spread your plans upon Mr. Secretary's desk, here, an' we'll have a go at 'em!"

"What we would like to have you do, General—with Mr. Secretary Bright and a couple of aviation experts—is to meet me at any flying-field you name, any day within a week, and let me bring my plane down to the ground before you—then, after explaining several of its details, take off again while one of your machine-gun batteries cuts loose on me as I go up. At an elevation of a thousand feet, you may also try any antiaircraft artillery you have.

"Now, I started Sunday morning from Mitchell Field, New York, and came down here in Sussex thirty hours afterward—with one mechanic, and enough fuel to have made a non-stop to Moscow, had I wished. My plane is made of a new metal half the weight of duralumin and twice as strong as high-carbon steel—which enables me to carry fuel for a six-thousand-mile radius. You can't penetrate it with machine-gun bullets or shrapnel—even the glass is bullet-proof, like the armored specie-cars. I can keep aloft at a third less speed than any other known plane—"

"Frankly, sir, you're claimin' a good bit. Now—one moment! You're both Americans, are you not?"

"We are. I'm from California—Stevens is from New York."

"Would ye not consider it a bit odd—were ye here in our places—that ye did not get your own Governm'nt to accept the thing?"

"Not if I knew much about our American politicians. I went to the War Depart-

ment day after day—and then the Navy Department—begging them to appoint a small committee before whom I could make a test. Finally, they agreed to examine my blueprints—and then filed an official report that a plane built according to those plans and specifications probably couldn't keep in the air an hour, and that it was too radical a departure from known aëronautic principles to be successful anyhow. Of course the whole story is that every one of the heads detests innovations—still believes in the fighting effectiveness of battleships and infantry as the first lines of defense—in spite of what the war taught us. The fact that we have, as yet, no Air Ministry like yours is proof enough of the bureaucracy we have saddled upon us. I'd never had from the time I first worked out the principle of my plane, the slightest idea of offering it anywhere but to my own government. Frankly, however—I got thoroughly disgusted. . . . . If the British Government accepts it, there is practically no chance that it will ever be used against us—and I'm damned if I'm going to see it scrapped as impractical junk! I've just made a record transatlantic flight with it—with a heavier load than ever was carried on a plane of its size. Here is a letter from the Commandant at Mitchell Field describing that load and the time I left there on the thirteenth. I can bring half a dozen witnesses to the time I came down in Sussex Monday afternoon. All I ask is to have three or four of you watch for an hour what my plane can do!"

SIR PROSBY SMITH had taken the roll of blueprints from Allerton's hand and spread them out upon Bright's desk as the American was speaking. The fact that he was unable to read any map but a typographical one of terrain made the blueprints merely so many sheets of meaningless lines and figures to him—and his inability to understand them convinced him that they had no practical value. So he did exactly what the astute radical, Bright, had expected him to do.

As he turned to the under-secretary, that executive said:

"Considering what Mr. Allerton so frankly admits his own department chiefs said about it, I fancy it would be most unwise to entertain any idea of purchase, General! I am not, myself, very well up in mechanics—which was my reason for calling you in. But I think we should decline to go any further in the matter. What is your opinion?"

"Er—we appear to be quite in accord, Mr. Secretary!" agreed Sir Prosby hastily. "From these drawings, I fancy there's little doubt as to the machine's not being suitable, in spite of what is claimed for it, for use in His Majesty's air service. We must decline to go further, Mr. Allerton."

THE American was by this time fighting mad.

"And if we decide to wait until your chief, Sir Bannington Morford, is well enough to grant us another interview, Mr. Bright?"

"Of course you may do that if you wish—an' care to waste your time. It is not our custom in His Majesty's government, however, to go over an official report by competent subordinates. I fancy you'll be quite unable to secure another interview with Sir Bannington."

"Well, you know your own customs better than I do, sir. But can't you grasp the fact that I will most assuredly sell my plane to *some* government? And eliminating our own, it's practically certain to be one of your enemies—who will pay a pretty high price to have an aircraft which you can't bring down with machine-guns or shrapnel—a plane carrying enough high explosive to wreck a square half-mile of London, each trip!"

As Allerton and Stevens went out, they discussed the advisability of waiting for Sir Bannington Morford's recovery—but Stevens shook his head.

"I've been over here three months, Jack," said he; "they're pretty well tied up with red tape and precedent. If it's customary for a subordinate in temporary charge to take full responsibility for anything he does in a case like this—and for his superiors to uphold him in it—I don't believe we'd gain an inch. Had we seen Sir Bannington, we'd have sold the plane. As it is, we simply wont see him unless in a hold-up on the street—and that wouldn't do us any good!"

"Say! There's a rather well-known peer over here, somewhere, who's some birdman himself—and a plane-builder as well! Suppose we look him up?"

"He might buy the plane as a matter of personal interest—but with the prejudice back there at the War Office, he'd never sell it to the government, and what we're after is the use by some government in

such an effective way that it will stop another war within a month or two."

As the two were entering the Hotel Cecil, where they were stopping, they met a fine-looking man whose face showed traces of the most aristocratic blood in Asia.

This individual glanced sharply at Allerton's face as they passed, then turned about and called him by name. For a moment, the American was puzzled—then he smilingly extended his hand.

"Chang Fu Ling! . . . . Well—well! This is a pleasant surprise! Who'd have expected to see you in London! This is my friend, Harold Stevens—New York man. Chang Fu and I were classmates at college, Harry. —Are you stopping in the Cecil, old chap?"

"Oh, no—I have my own house, overlooking St. James' Park. And you are both dining with me—that's understood, is it not?"

CHANG FU LING'S house was larger than they had supposed it would be, furnished in exquisite taste, and the service was perfect. From the manner of those who waited upon them, there was a very strong inference that Chang Fu Ling was a man of rather exalted position in his own country—the whole establishment bore this out. During the dinner, the suave Asiatic drew from them the object of their visit to England. When he had obtained the facts, their host quietly asked if they would motor down to Sussex next morning and show him what the plane could do. They got the impression that he might be influential, and readily agreed to his suggestion. Then he asked:

"If I am satisfied that your plane is all you claim for it, would you be willing to make a flight to Canton with me as a passenger—making but one stop—say, at Bombay?"

"I don't know of any possible objection to that, Chang Fu."

"Supposing the flight to be entirely successful—(it'll be a somewhat grilling test; you know)—would you consider doing business with China?"

"Thought China was so completely upside-down, just now, that there is no responsible government to make such a purchase!"



"I saw that plane peppered by two machine-guns while it was on the ground."

"That is the surface appearance, of course. In fact, we may prefer to let other nations retain that impression for a few years. But you've not answered my question, Allerton."

"Well, you see,"—Allerton hesitated,—"we've been hoping we might sell to a government strong enough to make effective use of it during a first offensive—stopping any such war in a month by sheer advantage in weapons—"

"Why shouldn't China be the country to do just that? Your plane might enable us to bring order out of seeming chaos within a few weeks—and then compel outside nations to let us severely alone. Would you sell to China—for a far better price than you'll get elsewhere?"

"I don't know why not! It's practically unthinkable that you'd ever use it against the United States—or even England. And somehow I can't see you using it against France either—if I've followed the trend of international relations correctly."

"I think I might assure you that your

plane would not be used against England, France or the United States—but that would about cover the immunity. Perhaps we may understand each other better if I give you certain facts in strict confidence. I happen to be the lineal Touchan of Kwang Hsien—the Governor—Viceroy—whatever term you choose to give it. The position is hereditary—always held by a Manchu—and for centuries to come the custom will remain unchanged. My ancestors have governed the province for considerably over two thousand years. I do not lead armies in the field—fight this faction or that, in China. I and my fellow Touchans hire generals to do that. In the world's press-reports, we are merely shadows in the background. When the time is ripe, however, and the Soviet menace has been completely crushed, a Touchan will be Emperor of China and whatever other territory we absorb.

"I happen also to be Chairman of the Great Tong—which, of course, you know nothing about, though its power reaches to every smallest corner of the globe, punishing by deaths here and there, rewarding with fortune for the deserving. One of the other Touchans has ungovernable ambition—without my power. He has paid nine men to poison or knife me—but those men were all decapitated, as an object-lesson to him. . . . . Come! . . . . I will put you up until we leave for the East. Two of my coolies are now fetching your luggage from the hotel—if you find a single article missing it will be replaced before morning. After breakfast, we will motor down into Sussex and you shall prove to me that your plane is what you claim. Then, when it is carefully tuned up and refueled, we will leave for Canton."

IT was a week before the monkey-wrenches thrown into the government machinery by the Honorable Patrick Bright began to make their presence felt—the first indication being an inquiry from Sir Austen when the last thirty-two men might be expected to report to him. Earl Trevor, in considerable annoyance, immediately called upon Bright at the War Office. Bright couldn't seem to recall the list he mentioned—and sent for his assistant Moffett. Moffett vaguely remembered bringing some such list up from Sir Bannington's office with several other papers. Both were of the opinion that it would be a hopeless job looking for such a paper now, however.

His Lordship then asked for the list of demobilized men in civil life and their service-record lists to compare with it—but was informed that he could not see these without an order from Sir Bannington or the Parliamentary under-secretary. Both of the obstructionists failed to realize the sort of man they were dealing with or that they were betraying exactly where the trouble was. His Lordship's tone and manner were still courteous, as he said:

"Sir Bannington's orders to you, Moffett, were not the sort which could have been misunderstood—he emphasized them a bit, and you repeated 'em just before you went out. You and Bright, here, were to send out communications to the men on that list *at once*—requesting them to report at the Foreign Office, where their services were badly needed."

"I remember now, Your Lordship, that I gave Mr. Secretary Bright the substance of Sir Bannington's message when I laid the papers on his desk."

Bright nodded in agreement—saying:

"And I now recall my remark that the list would receive my attention as soon as I could get to it. I never saw the list from that time to this—naturally assumed that it had been put through in the usual routine way."

"Rotten lack of system, Bright! Er—do you an' Moffett happen to be pacifists, by any chance? I recall your being on the Labor side in the House, some years ago."

"Really, you know, I fail to see what bearing that question has upon this matter! We're both 'disarmament-men'—if you've any reason for wishin' to know it. However, I'm at present holdin' an executive position in the War Office—doing the work of my department to the best of my ability. My personal opinions are entirely aside from the case!"

"Not when they disorganize any portion of the governm'nt machinery as badly as they seem to have done in this matter, Bright. I'll fetch you an order, presently, to submit those lists an' service-records. Please be quite sure that nothing happens to them in the meanwhile."

Earl Trevor was driven around at once to Sir Bannington Morford's home, and was told by the butler that his employer was much improved and doubtless would be pleased to have a brief chat with him. After a moment or two of congratulations and commonplace chat, Trevor asked Sir

Bannington to sign an order, which he was writing out, to submit the service-lists permitting His Lordship to make any copies he wished, and affording him every facility. In a few moments, he rose to go—when Morford motioned him to sit down again.

"I'm really much better than Your Lordship may think from appearances—practically no temperature for the last twenty-four hours—you are doin' me more good than harm, old chap. By the way, did you hear anything, or did Bright say anything, about those two Americans who had an appointm'nt with me on the seventeenth, about an airplane? From what they said in the few moments I had just then, I fancy it must be something we cannot risk lettin' any other governm'nt purchase."

"First I've heard of anything in that line! Who were they? Wish I could have seen 'em! Where are they stoppin'? Sounds deuced int'restin', you know."

"The inventor was a Mr. John Allerton and his partner is Mr. Harold Stevens, of New York—both at the Cecil, as I recall. You might ask Bright what action has been taken with 'em, if you will."

Trevor was back in Bright's office with his order in less than an hour and a half from the time he left it. Bright was sorely tempted to refuse to carry it out, on the ground that a sick man easily might have been partly irresponsible and not able to realize what he was signing—but, glancing up into His Lordship's piercing gray eyes, he saw in them something so compelling that he didn't quite dare.

It took nearly an hour for His Lordship to get the names he wanted and check them up from the service-records. Bright then picked up his hat and stick, about to leave for the day as soon as the records were returned to the safety-vault—but was detained by His Lordship with a question about the two Americans and their plane. The under-secretary shrugged his shoulders in disgusted annoyance, saying that the matter had been dealt with in the routine way and an official report filed on it. Trevor asked for the official report and read it through—knowing from personal acquaintance that neither Bright nor General Smith had any knowledge whatever of mechanics.

THEN His Lordship said, with emphasis: "Sir Bannington must not see this report until he returns to the War Office, Bright—it would certainly give him a relapse! I'll just make a verbatim copy of it before I go, in order that there may be no possible evasion of responsibility in case this original report disappears like my list. An'—er—I fancy, were I in your place, Bright, I'd put in a few moments this evening writing out my resignation from the service; Moffett also. The War Office isn't your proper line at all—not cut out for it."

"Humph! If your Lordship fancies you can bully a faithful executive out of the service, you may be obliged to reconsider a bit! How would you propose forcin' me out—with my official record—if I do not choose to go?"

"Well, there are two ways: One is to dig up a number of mysterious, unaccountable blunders in the War Office since you came here, which have been more or less disastrous to His Majesty's governm'nt—tracin' 'em directly to you an' Moffett. Aside from that, should it be necess'ry, I'll impeach you on the floor of the House! It would need but a statcm'nt of what those Americans had, an' what you did, in their case. So on the whole—don't you fancy it will be just as well to write those resignations this evening an'—er—leave for Paris with Moffett in the morning?"

EARL TREVOR'S mansion in Park Lane was now connected with the new "radio-intelligence" buildings at Whitehall by private telephone-cable, which made it possible for the Earl to transmit direct from his own radio and cable-room, sixty feet below his gardens, over the new station on Mt. Snowdon—also to receive from any one of the eighty sets that might be switched in on his wires, or connected with the Foreign Office direct through the switchboard of the "radio-intelligence" buildings. Aside from these facilities, he had of course the telephone-cable connecting the Park Lane mansion with Trevor Hall, his estate in South Devon, and his own powerful broadcasting station there.

The new Intelligence Department—which, as long as his Cabinet remained in power, was an active part of the Foreign Office equipment—was like a new toy to him, requiring so much attention in the way of organizing and perfecting it that he temporarily neglected some of his many other activities. He was talking every little while with the radio chief—with some operator in one of the receiving-rooms—or with Sir Austen, at the Foreign Office, who

had become as keen as himself over the idea. In fact three-quarters of the Cabinet Ministers were amazed at the amount of secret political information being picked up—delighted with the new facilities for obtaining it, though but four of them had any practical understanding of *how* it was gathered up. Outside of certain Cabinet ministers, the men in the radio-buildings, and possibly half a dozen in the Foreign Office—absolutely nothing was known about what was being done in those buildings or how it was accomplished. Even the sweeping and floor-mopping was done by the operators off-duty in order that no individual not tested and vouched for might obtain access to the various rooms.

From his interview with Bright, the Earl went home with a vague uneasiness concerning that American plane and where it might be at the moment. He gave the story to Countess Nan, Baron Abdool, and Earl Lammerford—all three agreeing that two of the best F. O. men should be put on the track of it at once. .

As they were discussing this in the big library after dinner, one of the operators at Whitehall called them up to repeat a news-broadcast which had been picked up from Newark, New Jersey. The gist of it was that considerable press-criticism was being made over the refusal of the War and Navy Departments in Washington to make a more thorough examination of a mysterious new plane submitted to them by its inventor—a Californian by the name of Allerton—and their permitting him to sell it abroad. It was stated that certain men well up in aëronautics had seen this plane in the air—had seen it unsuccessfully peppered with machine-gun bullets—and were responsible for the report that Allerton had made a record-flight of thirty hours in it from Mitchell Field to the Sussex downs with a heavier load than any plane of its size had ever carried. Trevor thanked the operator—repeated what he had said to the other three—and then waved his hands in the air, disgustedly.

"These damned pacifists! . . . . These universal disarmament men! Gad! If their ideas weren't so cursed Utopian, every person in a civilized country would agree with them! Who *wants* war? None but the brutal, grasping minds obsessed with the greed of world-conquest! Yet there are so many millions of them that disarmament simply means tame submission to unbearable enslavement at the hands of nations which don't and never will disarm! Well, I fancy that the milk is spilled irrevocably in this case, but we'll at least see what can be done!"

PICKING up the telephone again, Trevor was put through to Sir Austen's house and asked him for the two most competent secret service men in the F. O. They reported at the Park Lane mansion in half an hour—being shown into the library at once, where it seemed they needed no introductions, as both were army officers with brilliant records.

"Major Hartley, and Captain Merwin,—I'll outline the proposition before us as briefly as possible and ask if you've any information concerning it," said Trevor.

This he did in three or four minutes—concluding with his regret that he was unable to handle the investigation himself. "Up to the time we permitted ourselves to be hauled into the governm'nt, d'ye see, we had some pretty effective ways of gettin' information, an' were in position to go half round the world for it if necess'ry. But now we're tied down an' possibly would accomplish less than you chaps who are in the game. Do either of you know anything of those two Americans—Allerton and Stevens?"

"In a general way we do, Your Lordship—they were staying at the Cecil. Allerton came down in that mysterious plane of his a few miles from Cuckfield in Sussex, where it was locked in a rough but fairly strong hangar. Just after their last interview at the War Office, they were spoken to by a high-caste Manchu who maintains a rather expensive house here, though he seldom occupies it more than a few weeks at a time—possibly not more than six or eight weeks in the entire year. He took them off in his car, their luggage was sent for and they spent the night at his house, motoring down to Sussex in the morning. By that time, I was curious enough to follow in my own car. I saw that plane go up with more barrels of packed earth on it than I ever imagined a plane would carry—saw it maintain altitude, afterward, at less speed than any other plane has needed (without the barrels of earth, of course)—saw it peppered by two machine-guns while it was on the ground. At two in the afternoon, a couple of motor-lorries came down from the city with fuel and oil. At five in the afternoon, Allerton got aboard with a mechanic and



"Were I in your place, Bright, I'd write out my resignation from the service. The War Office isn't your proper line at all."

the Manchu—took off and flew away sixteen points East of South. Stevens had his luggage in the Manchu's car—was driven by the chauffeur to Folkestone, where he took the Boulogne boat."

"My word! . . . . Then I fancy we may be dished after all—if your Manchu was the man I suspect him to be! Was he by any chance our friend, Chang Fu Ling—the Touchan of Kwang Hsien?"

"Aye—he's a resident an' a rate-payer, here, under that name—supposed to be immensely wealthy. Not sure about the Touchan part of it. Your Lordship appears to know the man—what?"

"*Know* him!" ejaculated Trevor. "We four have rather made a point of knowing him, Major, because we've spent a good bit of time in the Chinese ports an' have some idea as to the under side there. Chang Fu Ling's people have governed Kwang Hsien for two thousand years or more. When order is finally restored, he or his descendants will be among the few in supreme power. We've a suspicion that he's the most influential man in the Great Tong, which controls all of the lesser Tongs—though you'll get nobody in Asia to admit that such a thing exists unless they're convinced that you have inside information. If he does control the Great Tong, revolutions may come an' go—Soviet influence may appear predominant, an' be crushed out again—temporary Presidents or Dictators may hold brief sway and then be decapitated—but the Touchans will remain the dominant power in the background, an' Chang Fu Ling will be Emperor of China if he lives thirty or forty years longer. He's related to the old Empress, you know—an' not so distantly, either. That's the sort of man who has probably bought this American plane. If we had to lose it, I'm thankful the purchaser wasn't in Moscow or Berlin. But we simply must have more information about the thing whether we've lost the plane itself as a model, or not. Allerton had a roll of blueprints at the War Office—doubtless he had copies of his metal formula, also. The whole outfit is now on its way to Canton—I'd gamble on that. Question is—can either or both of you get those blueprints or copies of them—and the formula? Chang Fu wont keep Allerton in Canton or near it—too much fighting an' confusion at present. But I fancy we can tell you about where you will find that plane—in the Yunnan foothills, where revolutionists aren't popular and the boat is practically safe. Do either of you understand the Cantonese or Yunnan dialects?"

"Merwin does—both of 'em. I specialized in Russian, Malay and Japanese. Fancy we'd best have a go at those plans together—that's to say, as far as Hongkong—with half a dozen rendezvous arranged for, up-country. Er—would your Lordship suggest destroyin' that plane, if possible?"

"Oh—rather *not!* That one plane could do but a minimum amount of harm. If you happened upon some isolated town where

duplicates of it were bein' turned out in quantity from Allerton's specifications an' formula, I'd say destroy it if you can without too great risk. After all, you know—you chaps belong to the Intelligence Branch at present, not the fighting one, an' you've risk enough in your own alley. If you fancy Allerton would consider any inducement at all, offer him a hundred thousand pounds to give His Majesty's governm'nt another chance to examine his plane before he disposes of it elsewhere. Any suggestions?"

"I was thinking— You see—if they make the entire flight to Canton in that plane, they'll have a pretty heavy advantage over us in the start they'll get before we're on the ground. I was considerin'—"

"How to overcome that handicap, of course. I can let you have our latest type of plane from our shops in South Devon—carrying five or six very comfortably with a full load. If you come down at Cairo, at Bombay, an' at Singapore—to re-fuel, she'll average a hundred and eighty miles the entire flight. How much of a start have they now?"

"Less than forty-eight hours."

"Then you may possibly gain a bit on them. If they're trying to make the flight in two hops, as I fancy Allerton will, they'll be conservin' their fuel and not trying to crowd her for speed. By coming down three times, you can use up your petrol as fast as you please, with plenty for each top. If you can start by two in the morning, I'll have the plane at our hangar outside the Croydon lines, waiting for you—and arrange ahead for your fuel."

DURING the next five days, Earl Trevor—sometimes accompanied by Countess Nan or one of his friends—spent a good many hours at the radio intelligence department in the rooms where messages were being picked up from Zeesen, Moscow, Irkutsk and Shanghai. On the fourth evening, when the Earl stepped into the decoding room next to that of the radio chief, who was in charge of the entire department, one of the code-experts handed him a sheet of paper upon which was a transcription which he had tested until convinced that it was as originally sent—the first code-word he had recognized being *Wustendski*; which he had many times checked up as the "attention"-call for the Russian Embassy in London. The transcript read, in more or less free English:

> Two Americans submitted very efficient type airplane War Office—seventeenth. Presumably declined. Americans subsequently disappeared. Type of plane similar description reached Canton this morning—cannot be located. Trace men and plane your end—searcb being made Canton. Destroy plane and plans if possible to get possession—procure sample of metal.

The Free Lances had little apprehension as to the Moscow lot being able to get much from Chang Fu Ling, or destroy Allerton's plane, as long as the Touchan had any personal interest in it. What they were more anxiously awaiting was some word from Major Hartley and Captain Merwin.

Ten days later, this came through from what might have been Chinese army equipment, or possibly some Touchan's private station which the F. O. men had managed to use without being caught at the time—afterward relayed from Hongkong and Singapore. It read like a report from certain railway engineers engaged in making a survey in the upper Yangtse district—sent to their syndicate in London. The code had been carefully worked out in Downing Street for just that sort of use—in cases where, if a message got out at all it had to be broadcasted as something quite plausible and unobjectionable. But when the decoding room finished the translation, it read:

> Copies, formula and sample forwarded three days ago—fairly certain to have left on Liner. Man guest of Touchan who has closed deal. Touchan courteous but suspicious. In his power. Little chance of overcoming evidence. Touchan probably rudimentary when convinced, though inventor might try averting extreme penalty. Major presumably safe. Sorry we probably wont meet again. "Morituri te salutant."

The Earl's eyes held a thoughtful expression as he read the message a second time—an expression of profound regret. Each of the Free Lances had been in the same apparently hopeless position scores of times but they had seemed to have charmed lives, extricating themselves in some incredible way at almost their last moment. He hoped most sincerely that likable young Captain Merwin, who had so efficiently carried out what he had been sent to do, might somehow manage to escape the obvious penalty for it; Trevor placed some slight reliance upon the really fine character he knew Chang Fu Ling to possess. Against that, however, was the Asiatic viewpoint which accepts death not only as a matter of course, but as the perfectly obvious ending resulting from various actions.

MEANWHILE, the Craithness Cabinet, naturally expecting to receive plenty of attention from the Opposition, had assumed that all of the obstructive tactics would come from that direction. So it was with some quiet uneasiness that they began to find members of their own party more or less influenced by pacifist and disarmament fallacies. In spite of all argument and object-lessons the propaganda appeared to be holding its own if not gaining slightly. Finally, it was decided to let His Lordship of Dyvnaint address the House as leader of the peers upon the question of national defense as it appeared in the Upper House.

After the customary salutation, gracefully delivered, he spoke for ten minutes upon living conditions under slavery during various historic periods—the lives of slaves—formerly free, but now conquered peoples. . . . . The pictures he drew were startling in their lurid truthfulness.

Then he went on:

"The whole question, gentlemen, is whether national and personal liberty is worth some sacrifice of life to preserve; *any* sacrifice of life—if you prefer putting it that way. If a mob of murderous plunderers come down one's street, burning the houses of one's good neighbors—butchering many of them—is it better to submit to that sort of thing without resistance—or to fight for home, family and liberty?

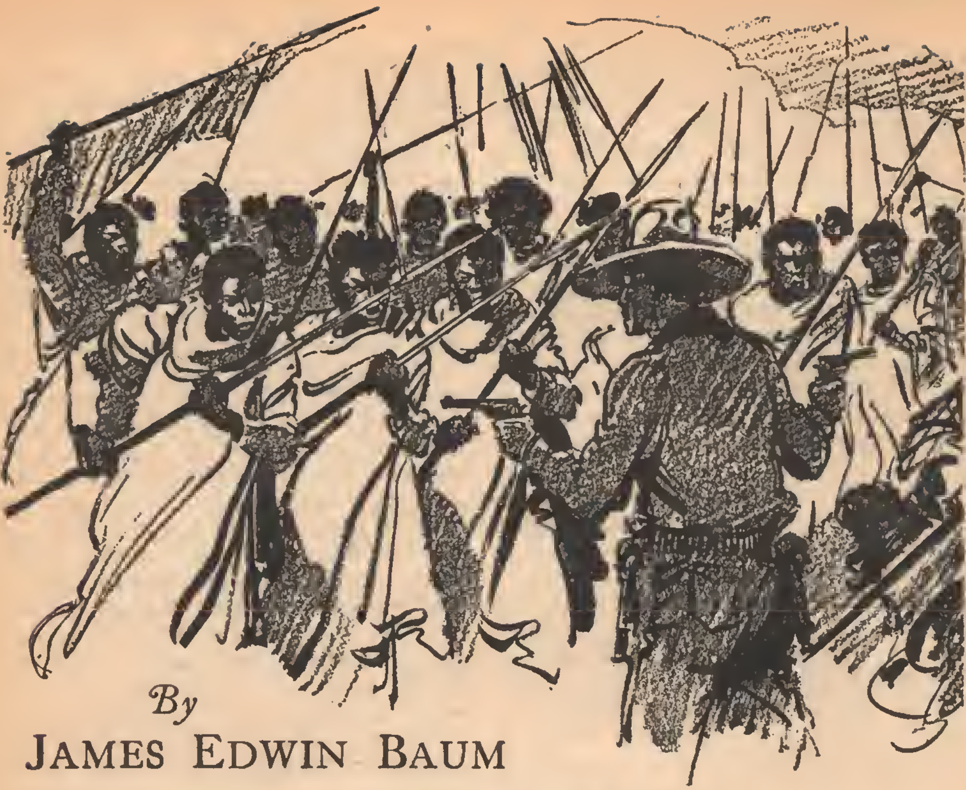
"We have on record in the Foreign Office absolute proof that several nations which have most strongly endeavored to obtain our agreement to general disarmament, at Geneva or elsewhere, have at this moment economic resources, stores of arms and munitions, which they haven't the slightest intention of scrapping, and which they suppose undiscovered—enough for a five-year war—plans for conquest figured out to the last decimal. If *we* disarm, and they only make a bluff at it—where does that leave *us?* A majority of the world's States desire peace and will make any reasonable sacrifice to maintain it. But a number of other States are equally determined upon conquest, sooner or later—with the cynical excuse that they mean to have their place in the sun and perpetuate their breed at the expense of all others.

"In order that I may bring home to you most forcibly the deadly menace of this 'universal disarmament' talk which never will be and never *can* be universal until human nature entirely changes, I will present to you a single instance in our own War Office. You are quite well aware that a certain number of subordinates in every departm'nt of the governm'nt do not go out with a falling ministry. They remain in office because they are familiar with all the detail and are of valuable assistance to the incoming governm'nt. As a rule, these are not strong party men—rather, they are business executives. Two of them in the War Office, however, happen to be not only strong 'politicals' but sufficiently bigoted to endanger the entire nation by quietly obstructing and nullifying Government action. Recently a new type of airplane was submitted at the War Office—a type so far in advance of anything yet known that a nation with a fleet of such planes would hold all others practically at its mercy. The Honorable Secretary of State for War was much impressed with the preliminary description, and made an appointm'nt for a more thorough examination three days later. At that time, however, he was seriously ill at home and, by a fluke of chance which might not occur again for some time, these obstructionist subordinates became automatically in charge of the War Office. They gave no encouragement whatever to the inventor; glanced over his planes in a merely cursory way—knowing nothing about mechanics and not understanding them—and filed an official report condemning that plane absolutely without even seeing a demonstration of it!"

HIS LORDSHIP paused impressively, then added:

"The inventor and the backer of that plane, seeing no possible chance of interesting this government in it, have now sold it to another nation. If that other nation ever declares war against us—well—I need scarcely point out to you our position! That is what two 'disarmament' bigots have deliberately done to the British Empire. They are also directly responsible for the death of one of the most brilliant officers in our Secret Service, who was trying to rectify their rotten work! Isn't it time, gentlemen, that we get back to a basis of common sense and a reasonable attitude toward national defense?"

When His Lordship sat down, the moment or two of impressive silence was broken by tumultuous applause which fairly shook the building. Whether he has gained much toward reasonable preparedness still remains to be seen, however.



By
JAMES EDWIN BAUM

Spears in the Sun

A captivating story of strange adventure in the wild highland of Abyssinia, by the historian and hunter of the recent Field Museum Expedition.

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

The Story So Far:

THAT romantic young adventurer Angus McPherson had come to Addis Ababa, capital of Abyssinia, at the conclusion of an ivory-poaching episode. And there as he idly watched the cavalcade of the chieftain Ras Gootama entering the city, he saw a strange thing—a young American girl with two old Westerners as companions, also watching the procession.

And just then—it happened. A retainer of the Ras, with his master's sanction, threw a stone at a crippled beggar; and the girl, in blind anger, struck the Ras across the face with her riding-crop.

Quick action on the part of Angus saved her. And later one of the old Westerners, Nick Marr, told him part of her story: she was in straits for money, with a blind mother to support, and was pursued by an objectionable cousin who wished to marry her. She had found some sort of paper locating a treasure in Abyssinia—and had come to find it.

McPherson helped the Americans outfit and saw them leave Addis without learning more. But a few days later another American by the name of Cantwell showed up and engaged McPherson to help him on an expedition in pursuit of the girl Mary Leonora, claiming her as his wayward daughter. Cantwell pushed his party swiftly in pursuit of Mary Leonora's party. And one day he confided to McPherson that he had obtained a copy of her treasure-clue—a paper in quaint ancient writing, discovered in an old suit of armor, describing a huge treasure of gold located by the old Portuguese adventurer Cristoforo de Gama, brother of the more famous Vasco. Cantwell also confided his plan to win the help of the local chief by presenting him with a machine-gun.



The events of the afternoon had been a shock to Mary Leonora—the black leader's rough grip on her arm, the rising yells, the ring of spears closing in—then a single quick shot from Nick, beside her.

It all seemed incredible to McPherson. But it became only too real when they reached the domain of this local chief and found him to be the same Ras Gootama whom Mary Leonora had chastised in Addis—and when Cantwell, presenting the Ras with the deadly machine-gun in spite of McPherson's protest, enlisted his help in attacking Mary's party, which had taken refuge in an ancient Portuguese castle. Once again, then, Angus strove against hopeless odds to interfere—and was left bound hand and foot while the attack went forward. *(The story continues in detail:)*

IT was the hour of sunset. Mary Leonora, framed in a high narrow casement of the ancient fortress, looked out upon the wide plains, sweeping from the massive stone abutments in long undulations toward the glowing sun. Westward, across league upon league of plain, mountain and thorn-bush—two months' journey—lay comparative civilization at the edge of the burning Sahara—Khartum, with its British garrison, a small but efficient force of white officers and men, its palm-shaded streets, countless Arabs, camels, donkeys. Somewhere in that direction, she knew, it lay dreaming upon the banks of the Nile.

The muezzins would now be mounting to circular balconies on round towers high above the flat adobe walls of the native quarter, Omdurman, to call the faithful to prayer in that weird, far-carrying cry that she had heard in Mohammedan towns along the shores of the Red Sea on the way to this old land of Prester John: *"Alla il Allah! Alla il Allah!"* Small detachments of Sudani troops upon the parade-ground would be standing rigid, at attention, behind bronzed white officers, awaiting the boom of the sunset gun. Even now the flag of Britain would be fluttering down from the tall pole.

Mary Leonora knew that these things would be going on at this hour, although she had never been to Khartum. But she

did not know that the khaki-clad Sudani troops would march to their barracks after the flag-furling ceremony, stepping jauntily to the skirling and braying of Scotch bagpipes in the rollicking tunes, "The Campbells Are Coming," and "The Cock o' the North," executed, with a dash and swing all their own, by black pipers proudly bearing upon cheek and forehead the scarred knife-slashes of tribal marks.

She could vision those smart squads, men but one rung above savagery on the ladder of progress, but well-armed and efficient under their quiet white officers. Oh, for one company—even one little machine-gun platoon! But, for all the help they could give her now, they might as well be upon one of the outer stars. For this massive and ancient fortress was without water. The old well within the walls was filled to the top with a rubble of sand and stones. And without water, two days would be the limit of endurance. Mary Leonora knew that. Taos and Nick knew it, and she *knew* they knew it, although both those gay young-old men talked boldly, optimistically, of water at the bottom of the well, of a sortie for water—or of fighting their way through the surrounding black hosts. She knew it was only a question of two days, and then—the end. And she had heard them talking to Sallassy, the interpreter, ordering him to start the men in pairs digging in the old well—a hopeless task.

THE fast-moving, bloody events of the afternoon had been a terrible shock to her sensibilities, a kaleidoscope of broken impressions. The tall chief of the escort first smilingly *suggesting* through the frightened Sallassy that she be escorted ahead of the caravan to the village of Ras Gootama. His vociferous argument and threatening attitude when Taos and Nick had refused point-blank to hear of such a thing. The ominous spears behind, backing him up, and toward the last—his rough grip on her arm. The rising pandemonium of yells. The shaking spears, lances trembling, shivering like live things in the hands of the warrior host. The short, sharp warning from Nick to the chief—a final stern ultimatum to order his warriors to keep back.

The black leader's disregard—the ring of spears closing in—another severe wrench on her arm—and then a single quick shot from Nick beside her. The sweep of his other arm at the same time, knocking her to the ground—the heavy soft fall of the chief's limp body across her shoulders—the unbelievably fast roll of the six-shooters—fanned, sounding like the clicking of speedy typewriters, only a hundred times louder—the desultory shower of spears that killed two caravan men directly behind. The spasmodic *boom! boom!* from the caravan *zebanias* with their ancient black-powder fusees.

The rough but kindly jerk of a hand that lifted her to her feet—the shambles in front, the numbers of blacks lying still, crawling away, gasping, coughing horribly. The wild mob running back to put a safe distance between themselves and those terrifying little guns; the howling, ferocious and devilish; and now and then at her side, the song of Nick, punctuated by the sharp, heavy explosions of his gun:

Oh, more than one has cashed his stack
And hit the trail on the Unknown Track
With an eight-inch dirk in the brawny back—

Boom! Boom!—zebanias' black-powder guns! *Crack, crack, crack*—six-shooters.

Some lie still on the barroom floor
Head and feet in their own red gore,
While over all the six-guns roar!

Chaos of yells from the black throng, scattered but gathering, and again that high, quavering voice, a note of satisfaction and triumph in it:

Oh, death rides out both night and day
He mavericks all who chance to stray;
Hi—yee—deedledum—doe!

And some men die in spur and boot
Caught plumb cold with the stolen loot.
For the dep-u-ty, as a rule, can shoot,
E-ee-ah! He sure can shoot!

A SUDDEN shout from Taos, directing Sallassy to order the men to drive the mules up the hill—into the old fortress. Taos and Nick covering the swift retreat, shooting casually, calmly. Reloading six-shooters deftly—changing to rifles—passing those back empty to the gun-bearers—following the disorganized caravan leisurely, stopping unhurried, to sight carefully. Mary Leonora herself, half dragged, half shoved, by a bearded *zebania*—roughly but still gently, in the direction of the old crumbling castle. The loud haranguing and fierce efforts of a minor chief to rally his men and lead them to the charge—to overwhelm the Ferengies before they reached the protecting walls. Taos sitting down to take steadier aim. The report of his rifle—the silent forward fall of the dan-

gerous exhorter. Nick, picking up the thread of his war-song after a shot:

And some are called with a single shot
And left to rot in a quiet spot;
And the coyotes get what the wolves do not;
E-eee-ah! What the wolves do not!

And some men die in a downy bed
With candles lit at the foot and head
But it's all the same when they're good and dead.

certain savage face as she snatched the pistol from Nick's holster and shot the black man dead as he made a run, almost to the castle entrance, spear poised, while Nick and the rest were desperately occupied in barricading the wide doorway!

She had stumbled up the crumbling runway through the wide portal into the old castle with a profound feeling of gratitude to those long-dead and forgotten stout hearts whose intrepid spirits were responsible for the great fortress. Its frowning walls and massive stones had seemed a secure haven at the time, like the quiet waters of a landlocked harbor to storm-tossed mariners in an open boat. At least



She snatched the pistol from Nick's holster and shot the black man dead as he made a run to the entrance, his spear poised.

here was temporary safety from that howling, bloodthirsty mob of savage warriors.

The whole thing had been a grotesque and impossible nightmare in which the swift and bloody incidents had crowded so fast upon each other that they remained etched upon her mind in the most distorted jumble of tangled and mixed impressions. The smallest parts of that terrible drama, for some unaccountable reason, stood out more clearly than important episodes. And Mary Leonora felt that if she lived a thousand years, she never would be able to shake off the remembrance of that whistling, whining sound, the waspish *"zing!"* of spears passing closely above as she lay upon the ground with the limp body of the chief across her shoulders.

Nor would she ever be able to wrench from her mind the memory of the blank, astonished expression that flitted across a

But now, as she gazed from the high casement toward the setting sun, she knew that nothing—nothing short of a miracle—could save them. And she felt a queer surprise, almost a shock, to see the great red sun, hung upon the far horizon, glowing, placid as a disk of molten metal, gilding the long reaches of plain and hill in beautiful, weird light, soft and tender as the light in the eyes of young lovers. It seemed so grotesquely unfeeling—even unkind—that this magnificent pageant of evening should proceed today just as it had for ages, eons,

in the same glowing robes of splendor and ineffable beauty: calm, serene, tolerant. It was incredible that this phenomenon, so placid, so tranquil, would continue unchanged through all the ages to come, shining down unmoved, unruffled by the terrible deeds of man—his battles, murders and sudden death. And Mary Leonora Rankin, for the first time in her existence, came to the realization of what an infinitesimal position a single human life occupies in the Great Scheme of Things.

NICK MARR, his wide, double-*terai* felt hat upon his head at an acute angle, interrupted her. He stalked along the stone corridor, the high heels of his old riding-boots striking the stone floor with sharp and confident staccato clicks.

"I aint had so much fun since Uncle Sam's pony soldiers run old Geronimo back on the reservation!" He took off his hat to wipe a red forehead with redder bandana. Mary Leonora glanced at the snow-white hair with a deep feeling of pity and self-accusation. She reached gropingly for his gnarled hand:

"Nick, old friend, I—I can't say—how sorry I am I got you into this!"

Nick grinned happily. It was impossible to be cast down, spiritless, tragic, with this buoyant old person.

"Did you see old Taos bore that greaser chief while he was tryin' to prod his buckaroos to head us off? The way that *hombre* plunged forward, droppin' his Texas toothpick, was the suddenest thing I've seen since Grandmaw fell downstairs with the scissors in her hand. Taos aint lost his eye for a hind sight. That shot was four hundred yards if it was a inch."

Taos came up, and at once Nick switched his laudatory manner:

"Taos, I was just tellin' Mary Leonora what a good shot I made on that chief—there toward the last—the one that dropped his spear so graceful and done a hoolihan like a front-footed mustang. You seen that?"

"You!" Taos was on guard instantly. "You was loadin' your six-shooter. You never fired that shot! Or maybe you're one of them Diamond Dick, Buffalo Bill critters that loads with one hand and shoots blindfolded with the other. No sir! I set down on these two decrepit hams"—slapping himself on the seat—"and, as they used to say in them hospital books, 'Our hero, sighting for the heart, ca'mly twigs the trigger.' You got meat of your own. Keep your hands out of my smokehouse; don't Injun around my private graveyards and mausoleums tryin' to maverick my own personal corpses! And I'll bet a four-dollar dog, if you dig out the bullet—"

"Shucks! There you go! The bullet went on through and you know it. Can't nothin' be proved now—his men drug him off by the hoofs—I seen 'em."

Mary Leonora knew that it was not beyond Taos to suggest a quiet and dangerous sortie under cover of night just to settle the affair and prove his statement. And she thought that Nick would gleefully encourage such a dangerous suggestion. She took a hand:

"The man is dead as Julius Cæsar, anyway. But we are alive and that reminds me—we're going to need water mighty badly. And the poor mules, what a lot they'll need—and all the rest of us. How long do you think we can last without it?"

"Well, these old-timers," Nick replied, "—Portuguese, weren't they?—who hurled up this rock house, had to drink water themselves once in a while, whether they liked it or not. They had a well—you seen it. Borama and some of the boys are diggin' her out now. It's a job of work, but when they get to the bottom, we'll find a plenty. I don't reckon them savages will try to swarm in on us. They'll just wait, thinkin' we can't get water. That'll give us a chance to dig out the well. Six men are on guard now—"

He was interrupted by the entrance of Sallassy.

"There is come"—his eyes were round and big with the information—"a great army of *zebanias*. It is the *zebanias* of Ras Gootama—the men from his village; and I think,"—his lowered voice and apprehensive air betrayed his fear of the ruthless and savage personality about which such gruesome stories had been told,—"I think Ras Gootama himself is arrive' with those men. There is a great crowd aroun' somebody, way off on the hill. Yes, I think it is Ras Gootama. Oh, if he is come, I think we are surely never get out from thi-is place alive!"

BUT the old cowboys, in spite of their light attitude of jovial and careless assurance before Mary Leonora, were fully alive to the desperate nature of their situation. They had made a thorough inspec-

tion of the ancient fortress, had posted men, distributing them at advantageous places, and were confident that while the fairly plentiful supply of ammunition held out, they could repulse an attack. There was food enough in the chop-boxes to last a month. But they had investigated the old well minutely. And it had been a great disappointment—now almost filled to the top with the accumulations of three centuries, its clay sides caved in by the torrential downpours of countless rainy seasons.

They had concluded that even if the sand and stones could be removed in time, there would be small chance of finding water.

"She went dry—that's why these niggers let her fill up," Taos had stated confidentially to Nick at their first inspection. "You don't reckon if they could have got water here old Gootama, or whatever his name is, would have passed up this here fort and built his shebang on the next hill! Not much. The old Portugoose long-hairs that hurled up this stoopendous edifyce of arkitecture knowed what they was a-doin'. When the well petered, they slapped their old double-rig saddles on the best cayuses they had in the corral, swung aboard, like as not from the off side, hit 'em down the hind leg and went skallyhootin' down the *barranca* for home—where they belonged. We wont find no water here. But this old rock homestead is sure a noble piece of work and does 'em proud. Why, it makes the public library in Laramie look like one of them windbreaks of old ties that hoboes shove together in the winter along the U. P. tracks. No sir! If there was water at the bottom of that hole, old Gootama would be a-settin' right here with his village built around this big shack, enjoyin' himself watchin' his straw-boss round up and larrup his slaves with a blacksnake."

"You may be right," agreed Nick, "but I aint so sure he kept away from here because she went dry. There's a whole herd of superstitions that pester these saddle-colored folks. They've got to bed 'em down and sing 'em to sleep before they dare do anything. How do we know—maybe the priests or medicine-men loaded this place up with ha'nts and spooks. Don't go tryin' to figure out why a savage does things. I aint what you'd call no shoutin' optimist on this water business myself. But it wont hurt to prospect that old hole-in-the-ground. It'll keep the men busy for one thing, and maybe so we can make Mary Leonora believe we're just one jump from water. She's the hardest proposition to lie to, though, I ever encounters in all my lyin' experience—which covers years. Wish we had with us an old threadbare moth-eaten party I once sees locate water with a hazel rod down in Utah! 'Here she is, boys,' chirps this old water-witch, when the hazel branch in his hand trembles and quivers. 'Here she is, friends. Sweet water lyin' right below in the bosom of the hills. Drill your hole right here. Science opens up all the secrets of mother y'earth.' Them Utah grangers digs and bores mighty confident, and sure enough—at fifty feet—they get artesian water!"

Taos shook his head.

"Well, this aint Utah. And we're on a high hill here, and there aint a Chinaman's chance for rain at this time of year. You and me might just as well begin figurin' on what to do after tomorrow. We can't get to the bottom of that old well in less than twenty-four hours—if she's any depth at all. And when we do, and find her as dry as a sagebrush flat on the Mohave desert—it'll be time to move. Then we'll be up against the iron! It aint possible to fight our way through—there's too many of 'em; it aint in the cards. It'll be a case of selectin' your method of shakin' hands with the old longbeard with the scythe, that's all. Stayin' here or makin' a run and a big fight—either one, sure suicide."

"Me and you could have a plumb eventful and exhilaratin' time on a push through. Short but plenty thrillin'. But"—and the white-haired old head turned, the eyes avoiding those of his companion—"what can we do with Mary Leonora?"

"I BEEN thinking some about that," Taos replied casually, "and I reckon it's just possible them savages would give a lot to have one of us alive. There's a chance we might make a deal—fact is, I've talked to Sallassy and Borama, and they seem to agree. If there aint no water at the bottom of that well,—and there wont be,—I'll have Sallassy make 'em a big medicine talk from the wall. I'll give myself up, provided they give hostages and agree to let the rest march out safe. . . . . Now don't get up on your ear! It don't make no difference to me—and Mary Leonora wont know nothing about it till it's done."

"If you aint the raggedest old idiot!" Nick ejaculated, alarmed at the quiet determination in his partner's face.

"All right," Taos replied easily, "let's have another plan, then. If you can dig up a better one—go ahead, let's hear it."

"Why," Nick snorted, "you can't make no compacts with savages. You ought to know better! It wouldn't hold 'em no more than a muskrat trap would hold grizzly bears!"

"Sure. I know that. But you'll get hostages."

"Hostages!" Another snort of disgust. "What's a couple of savages in hock mean to that outfit?"

"Well—go ahead." Taos in his turn was indignant. "Come through with a better idea."

Nick fell silent. He knew of no better plan. There was no better plan. At length he remarked:

"Well, if that's the best we can figure out when the time comes, we'll both go. That'll mean twice the number of hostages."

LATER, as the two stood with Mary Leonora beside the narrow casement of the old keep, the African night fell suddenly—as if a black curtain had been rung down upon the stage of the world. Sallassy had just reported; and now, pointing through the narrow stone aperture, he indicated the hundreds of tiny fires springing to light on the hills as the newly arrived reinforcements prepared to bivouac.

"It is the camp of Ras Gootama."

And as the darkness deepened, the multitude of fires burned cheerily in a great ring about the ancient fortress. Now and then indistinct voices close beneath the walls floated up, and an occasional warrior at a distance was heard hallooing loudly. The besiegers were calling back and forth, the tones far-carrying and ominous in the velvety darkness.

Taos and Nick made the rounds and arranged the plan of defense for the night. The men were divided into watches, one shift to be on duty at a time; sentry-go along the high walls, a period digging and working at the old well, with two men constantly on guard at the barricaded entrance. The watch off duty slept near that great sally-port—for this was the point of danger.

Either Taos or Nick would make the rounds continually throughout the period of darkness, and Mary Leonora had insisted upon standing watch in her turn. No attack was anticipated—even natives would realize the foolishness and needlessness of such sacrifice, knowing that thirst was their greatest weapon. They would wait calmly, patiently; it would be only a matter of two days, and then certain victory.

But notwithstanding the small likelihood of an assault, Nick and Taos took every precaution. Reliable men were stationed at important posts. The barricade of fallen roof-timbers that barred the great doorway, was strengthened, and it was understood that the white man on duty should pass the greater part of his time, when not making rounds upon the high wall, at this vulnerable point.

MARY LEONORA, leaning over the parapet high above the black earth, watched the twinkling fires upon the encircling hills with a detached feeling of unbelief—almost of wonder. It seemed so needless, so unintelligent—so insane even—for the members of one race to be thus thirsting for the blood of a handful of human beings of another breed, principally because they *were* of another race. That thought, she realized, might be applied to all war—even so-called civilized warfare. Oh, if there were a God—a Being who directed the measured movements of those gleaming starry hosts burning in the sky—why hadn't He instilled in the hearts of men a little more of the milk of human kindness? Just one touch of the magic wand of tolerance—and such ghastly tragedies could not happen! Nick had been tolerant. That first shot had not been fired until the circle of spears had begun to draw close. If he had waited ten seconds longer, not one of the caravan would have had a chance for life. And now, after what she had passed through, Mary Leonora was supremely grateful for that timely shot. Had they allowed her to leave the caravan, there was no telling what might have been her lot.

It was hardly conceivable that the leader had attempted to take her by force for a friendly purpose. But the chief of this northern country, Ras Gootama, while reported to be a tyrant of the first magnitude, was still said to be reasonably friendly to whites. Then why had he ordered his chief to take her by force? For she knew the man would never have dared to seize her without definite orders



Pointing through the narrow aperture, Sallassy indicated the hundreds of tiny fires springing to light on the hills. "It is the camp of Ras Gootama," he said.

from his ruler. It was a strange thing. And now it had developed into a tragic thing.

Mary Leonora did not allow herself to think of her mother. That was one train of thought she feared. She fought it down desperately, almost savagely. She was a woman—and the cause of their hopeless plight. This last responsibility filled her with a deep and unutterable feeling of regret. Nothing she could do would change that. But she would not compound it by becoming a burden. And she simply would not break down. When it came to the last few drops of water in the last unemptied canteen, she hoped, prayed, for strength to resurrect from the wreck of a thirst-tortured mind spirit enough to refuse it, womanhood enough to force it upon one of the others.

"At least," she asked, "grant me courage to go out with the poor satisfaction of knowing that I did not accept the last merciful drop of water!" Her thoughts, she found, were already beginning to turn with increasing frequency upon lakes, running streams, cool, sheltered brooks.

AS the night wore on she felt less inclined than ever to sleep. Taos, and Nick in his turn, had urged her to lie down upon the cot her tent-boy had set up on the stone floor of the great keep. She had refused, and they had gone off upon their rounds, quiet, composed, inspiring confidence, at least temporarily, in the most woe-begone and disheartened of the men.

And now, as she stood with a hand resting upon the outlandish head of a gargoyle upon the high wall, gazing in abstraction into the pitch-black night, a faint noise caught her attention. She was on the point of calling out to summon Nick or Taos, when the sound resolved itself into a low, urgent whisper. Again she was on the point of challenging when she caught the word, *"Sahib,"* guardedly hissed. Could this be a friendly voice? A native who dared be friendly in a region swarming with enemies, in a land two months' journey from another white person? Then the wild thought rushed headlong through her mind: "Khartum! A detachment of Sudani troops—by some miraculous means. But no! That is impossible!"

"Sahib—Ferengie—w'ite man." Indistinctly the cautious native voice floated up the wall. Taos was approaching on one of his interminable rounds—Mary Leonora could hear the click of his heels on the stone. She would wait—

Insistently the low whisper came again: "Sahib—my sahib, he die!"

Sahib—that must mean a white man.

"Who are you?" she called down softly, very low.

"Ali. My sahib who fights the *zohon*. He die."

Taos arrived, and Mary Leonora hastily whispered her news. Again came the voice from below, at great risk of being overheard by Ras Gootama's scouts and lookouts, who must be very near in the darkness:

"My sahib. He will die. He mus' not die."

It was Mary Leonora's quick intuition that connected the name Ali, and the fragmentary voice, with Angus' Somali gun-bearer back in Addis.

"The sahib, McPherson? He is there with you?"

This time the voice came more distinctly from the blackness below:

"It is that one. He die from the spear."

"Come along the wall to the gate, the door—this way—" Taos gave the direction in the Stygian blackness by whispering as he crept along the wall toward the stone stairway. Running down, he waited behind the timber barricade.

Presently a scratching sound came from the outside. But even as he prepared to strike a match behind the shelter of his hand, a great commotion broke out upon a distant hilltop. Hallooing and calling came from the direction of the village, evidently ordering the scouts and sentinels nearest the old fortress to intercept.

Between spaces in the barricade Taos saw the bent form of a black stooping beneath a clumsy burden, a burden with trailing arms and legs—a white man! Nick came running with the candle lantern, and way was made through the timbers.

ALI deposited his burden gently on the stones of the great hall. He straightened his back with an effort and stood, chest heaving and eyes gleaming like white balls in the candlelight.

"The sahib. He is a veree great sahib. He is my sahib who fights the *zohon*. He mus' not die!" And the Somali glared about him at the ring of faces fiercely, challengingly, as if daring anyone to intimate that his sahib would die.

Mary Leonora caught her breath with a queer tightening of the heart as she carefully cut away the blood-soaked shirt. A great gash, quite evidently the work of a spear, pierced the shoulder, just missing the lung. The face was chalk-white and the eyes were closed, but the heart beat strong and steadily. Barring blood-poison, Angus would live to laugh at the wound.

"Your sahib—" Mary Leonora straightened to face the tall Somali. Tears, unaccountably enough, of pure gratitude, stood, clear, transparent as shining jewels, among the dark lashes.

"Your master—who fights the *zohon*—shall not die. I promise—"

But the lean Somali, without a word in answer, turned and disappeared with catlike swiftness through the barricade. He had waited only to hear that his sahib would recover—and was gone!

"Well, if that don't beat all hell!" Taos cried, astonished enough at the man's entrance with his blood-bathed white burden, but utterly dumfounded at his sudden disappearance.

Nick, looking up from his position beside Angus, observed:

"I once seen a fifth ace appear onexpectedly in a poker game—but this here *dis*appearance of the ace of spades has got me plumb dazzled!"

Ali was indeed gone. No reply to their repeated hails came from the darkness. The barricade was replaced—for the *zebanias* of Ras Gootama could be heard moving closer—to guard against a sortie.

"Still—it's not so queer," Nick added. "He sees a chance to make his get-away alone. He couldn't get through with McPherson wounded on his back. He done the best he could. You can't blame him for fadin' away." And by those words Nick Marr did a great but unconscious injustice to one Ali Eisa, Somali gun-bearer, who had stuck by his master in the face of many a nerve-shattering charge of trumpeting bull elephant and sundry hair-hung lion encounters. The Somali had stuck, unshaken, in those perilous times—and he had no intention of changing his spots now.

CHAPTER IX

IN the great keep with its round walls, narrow slotted windows and arched Gothic ceiling, Angus sat upright on Mary Leonora's cot. His face was flushed and feverish, and the blue-gray eyes beneath the tangled mop of sandy hair burned with an unnatural light. The strong youthful constitution was battling with the nervous shock of the spear-wound. Day was breaking, and with the coming of the light the deathlike coma of the night had passed.



"My sahib—he will die from the spear," came a voice from below. Taos saw the bent form of a black stooping beneath a burden with trailing arms and legs—a white man!

But the wild, haunted eyes were those of a creature at bay. The mind struggled with the impossible forces of delirium.

Mary Leonora, busy with coffee-pot and small pan over a fire of chips cut from ancient wormy timbers, knelt upon the stone floor. She was not alarmed. The delirium was to be expected from so serious a wound. Her medicine-chest, as important in Africa as a rifle, was complete and intact. Angus spoke in a weak but stern and implacable voice:

"If your royal dusky Highness,"—and he bowed stiffly from his sitting position on the cot,—"will honor me in one of the favorite pastimes of my ancestors—single combat—I shall be only too happy to meet you with spear or scimitar—mounted or on foot—"

Mary Leonora approached the cot and gently pushed the wounded man to the pillow. She pressed upon him a sip of coffee: it had taken an alarming quantity of precious water from her canteen—water that she had resolved to hoard exclusively for her burning patient. But Angus would not stay down.

"Cantwell!" he cried wildly. "You shall not do this! You shall not set blacks to murder whites in a black man's country!"

Mary Leonora soothed him with gentle words. His eyes closed and she thought he slept. But again he sat up.

"They've got my guns! Ali! Ali!" he shouted loudly. "Cut these *shammas*. The old fort! Look out! Take that spear. There, now we'll get through! Jolly weapons, spears, in hand-to-hand fighting. Should be used in the trenches. No! He got me—through the shoulder. Can't go—farther—loss of blood, my wound. Go on. Leave me, I say. Get—to the fort—do what you can for 'em." A long pause—then: "Cantwell is the devil himself. Yes, yes,"—soothingly, as if speaking to a child, "the *shaitan*." And Angus trailed off into a mixture of Amharic and Arabic, ordering, directing Ali.

After that outburst he lay still for some time. The early sun poured in cheerful flood through the narrow casement, gilding the opposite wall. Mary Leonora watched beside the cot, haggard and worn, brooding upon the dead checkmate of their situation. What a horrible reality to wake up to, she thought, when this poor wounded man wins through his delirium. Angus muttered. This time his wandering mind dwelt upon gentler things.

"Mary Leonora," he said so quietly that she thought at first the delirium had passed, "I would rather have that vision, that picture, than a great hall filled with Titians and Rembrandts. A moving picture it is, with a background of dark, bearded faces. Into the scene rides a beautiful girl. Her

arm—what a neat, khaki-clad arm it is—is raised aloft. It comes down once, twice! Ah, that picture shall hang upon the walls at Gleneyre some day—beside the row of kilted Highlanders with their round shields and claymores, their jaunty, feathered caps and their brave motto: *'Touch not the cat but a glove.'* We McPhersons are proud of that crest—"

What a fine, noble sentiment, Mary Leonora thought: *"Touch not the cat but a glove!"* Take up the glove, the challenge of a clansman, man to man, but do not disturb the cat, the symbol of the fireside peace of his home, his women.

The weak voice trailed on, but now it became stern. The fierce burning light returned to the eyes. Angus again sat up. Pointing straight at Mary Leonora, he spoke, calmly enough, but with a cold and deadly precision.

"There is another thing, Ras Gootama. If you so much as harm one hair of that sunny head, I'll hunt you down and kill you—so help me God—with these two bare hands."

The wounded man lapsed into silence. His eyes closed. At last he slept. Mary Leonora tiptoed to the window. The African sun was now beginning its day's march toward the zenith. Mountain and plain were smiling up at her, bathed in the early light, and a flock of wild pigeons hurtled past the casement, hastening to a far rendezvous. The near-by hills were peaceful and silent; the countryside lay day-dreaming, fresh, beautiful as a mighty canvas by Millet. And she thought of the old knights in armor who had stood, at that same window three centuries before, and gazed upon that smiling scene.

But now upon the far hills she could see a mighty host scattered about in groups—waiting: waiting for their deadly ally, thirst, to conquer for them. She shuddered. There were so many, so very many spears flashing upon those distant hilltops! It was hopeless—and Angus McPherson must wake up to this impossible situation, worse than any in his delirium!

WHILE she stood brooding upon the sheer cruelty of such an awakening, Nick Marr entered the room. His felt hat was cocked at its usual precarious angle. His high-heeled boots hit the stone floor with brisk confidence. He glanced at the cot, jerked a thumb in that direction and whispered:

"How's the McPherson makin' it?" And in answer to her carefully nodded assurance, he went on: "He's a way-up good cowboy. Can't figure out what he was doin' in this neck of the woods, but he aint here for his health—you can bet a stack on that. Had a powerful run-in with old Gootama himself, from his ravin' talk last night when me and Taos carried him up here. Wanted to fight us—dignified as a prairie-dog—ca'mly throws a challenge at Taos, callin' him Ras Gootama. Me and Taos is plannin' to take that boy home with us. . . . . But what I come to tell you—there's a band of savages, dozen or so, comin' toward the wall on the other side—and they're totin' a white flag! Where these greasers ever learnt about a flag of truce sure beats me! Looks like a white man with 'em too."

Angus stirred; then, throwing aside the blanket, he suddenly sat up and demanded sternly:

"Do you know anything about the Plutonian persecutions and the secret specifications of the Spanish Inquisition? Such pastimes as martyrdom, impalement, the wheel, the rack, keel-hauling and the bastinado are new to you, aint they? Well, you'll learn something!"

Nick, abashed, withdrew. Mary Leonora quieted her patient, smoothing his tousled hair, and placed the precious but half-empty canteen to his lips. And under her ministration he settled down into a calm sleep.

In a few moments, Nick was back, his face wearing an expression of mingled wonder and astonishment.

"Come here, Mary Leonora. There's a white man down in the hall—come in under the flag of truce. Says he wont talk to no one but you! Seems to know you. I can't make it out!"

Mary Leonora, completely at a loss to account for this strange development, descended the flat stone steps. There, in the middle of the vaulted hallway, surrounded by the caravan men with Taos waiting, iron-visaged, beside him, stood a tall, powerfully built man in neat, well-fitting tropical clothes, a clean white sun-helmet in his hand.

She stopped on the stairs, unable to believe her eyes.

"Floyd Rankin! Cousin Floyd!" the words came almost without her knowledge.

"Well, Mary Leonora! I suppose by this time you've had enough."

NICK and Taos both looked sharply at the domineering features, which bore a strange mixture of triumph, ruthlessness and fawning gallantry. Mary Leonora with an effort recovered her presence of mind.

"What are you doing here? Oh, I see! You followed us. And now—"

"And now," he interrupted, with an air of businesslike determination, "I'll take you out of this. Your men, and these two outlaws"—he indicated Taos and Nick with a motion of disgust—"will have to settle with Ras Gootama. You are to be under my protection. Ras Gootama and I are the best of friends—in fact, allies."

"So it was you who urged him to this attack!" She saw to the bottom of the thing in a flash. "It's your doing, is it? What a monstrous thing!"

"Have you ever known me fail to get what I set out for?"—thrusting his chin forward. "I don't think you have. And you may remember that I made up my mind about you some time ago. I think I told you once that you'd have to come round sooner or later. You've put me to all this trouble so now you'll come without benefit of clergy. Unless I get maudlin and have one of Gootama's so-called priests do the honors, which isn't likely."

"Floyd Rankin!" Mary Leonora stood straight and slim as a young eucalyptus tree. Neither Taos or Nick had ever seen such deep disgust, such withering scorn as showed in her pale face.

"Floyd Rankin, although by accident of birth you happen to be my cousin, you are the lowest being, the most debased form of life, it has ever been my misfortune to meet." She turned, her small head held high, her back rigid. Taos Linley, with murder in his eyes, stepped before the immaculately arrayed and unmoved object:

"I've killed men before—when I had to," he observed. "But they always had an even break or better. I've killed rattlesnakes for pleasure; they didn't get a chance. But just because you've got hands and feet and a face, I'll forget your rattlesnake's heart and treat you like a human. Nick!"—and Taos whirled on his partner. "Pass him your gun!"

MARY LEONORA flew to the old cowboy, and reaching up, took his lined face between her hands, pulling the white head down. With a sob that seemed to wrench her slim body, she buried her face in the stubble of that brown-parchment cheek. But quickly she pushed herself away and took control of the situation:

"There will be no dueling—no gun-play. This—thing—came here under a flag of truce. He must go back the same way. We are almost at the end of the tether, and when we—we go out, there must be nothing approaching murder upon our hands—"

"But—Mary Leonora!" Taos broke in, "he gets an even break. Kings can't ask no more. That's fair enough, white flag or no white flag!"

"Taos and Nick,"—she spoke with quiet determination, irrevocably, but with a note of deep tenderness in her voice that stilled them instantly,—"an idea has just come to me. I brought you into this—this unhappy business. And I'll see you out of it." Her small features were illumined by a light from within. She stood calm and composed as the very stones of the wall, but the heart within her was like a dead thing.

"I will go with Floyd Rankin—under one condition: that the caravan be allowed to march out—out of this terrible country, unmolested, in safety. There must be guarantees—hostages—and—"

A voice, weak but arresting in its clear decisiveness, came from the stairs. Angus McPherson, his delirium gone, his shoulder bound with a cloth that showed a blotched stain, stood, half-clad, leaning for support against the stones of the wall on the upper landing:

"Miss Rankin—just a word. I have trekked with that man for two months." He pointed a bloody finger across the big hall at the man who had been Cantwell. "I know him, rather too well. I know natives—and I know Ras Gootama. You must not make that sacrifice. I swear to you it would be worse than useless—and for you, infinitely worse than a clean death!"

And before Mary Leonora could answer, Taos silently pointed to the opening in the barricade.

Floyd Rankin bowed ironically to Angus high above on the landing, spread hands in a gesture of mock resignation, a motion that was meant to indicate: "I have done all I can for you. The rest must be upon your own heads." Taos took his arm without haste but in a grip that was almost disabling, and led him through the barricade. Once outside, Rankin turned and addressed the cowboy with great composure but with upcurling lip of scornful triumph:

"Just for your information, I might mention that I have a machine-gun, plenty of ammunition and ten thousand spearmen at my disposal. Perhaps you optimists believe in miracles. Well—figure a way out—if you can!" And he was gone.

"That man," remarked Taos, speaking to himself in surprised but hopefully interested tones, "has given me something to look forward to! The pleasure of killin' him—and that's sure one chore that wont be overlooked!"

SLOWLY the day passed, leaden-footed. The small store of water that some of the men had happened to have in their waterbags when the attack developed, was gone. Not more than an inch remained in Mary Leonora's canteen. And this she was resolved should go to Angus. But his delirium had left him as suddenly as it had come, left him clear-headed. And now that he knew what he was doing, he steadfastly refused to taste it.

After a talk with Angus, while Mary Leonora slept, Taos and Nick had renounced their former idea of giving themselves up.

"It's no use," Angus had said, "—just weaken the party. Agreements, hostages, would mean nothing to these people. And furthermore—just between us—Ras Gootama is the bearded old sportsman that Mary Leonora flayed so charmingly with her riding-crop in Addis."

"Great snakes!" And Taos laughed mirthlessly, with lips already cracked and blistered. "Well, I reckon it *would* be jumpin' into a tarantula's nest to walk into that camp! Hostages? Why, he'd no sooner let her or any one of us get away than he'd chop off his right arm!"

"No," Angus continued. "I don't see anything for it but to march out with colors flying, as it were, fight till they cut us down—have as good a time as we can while the show lasts. It's one of those unpleasant last-resort affairs—thin red line—Birkenhead drill—sort of thing. Rotten outlook. And it's got to be tomorrow. Can't last another day. But as for Cousin Floyd's machine-gun, don't bother about that. It's out of commission. Here are a few gadgets—parts of its essential guts—that I brought along as souvenirs." And Angus took from the pocket of his khaki trousers on the wall three small metal parts of the mechanism. "It might have been better," he added dubiously, "to have left the machine-gun intact. It can't make any difference in the outcome with that host of warriors, and somehow I fancy bullets more than spears—but I may be a bit prejudiced after this stab in the shoulder. Funny I don't remember much about it. Seems to me I got the author of this wound with a spear I picked up—but Ali mav have knifed him. By the way, I don't understand that Somali. Didn't think he'd leave as you say he did. Can't understand it."

The day drew to a close and the early part of the night passed uneventfully. But the caravan men were now almost without hope and refused to be cheered by Nick and Taos as those two indefatigable ones passed, making the rounds. The squad at the old well dug feverishly off and on, by fits and starts. It was a futile task, and they knew it; but hope springs eternal in the human breast, and they roused from lethargy now and again to attack the dry clay in desperation.

Mary Leonora had retired to a bed prepared for her in a guard-room just beyond the great round keep where Angus lay wounded upon her own cot. She slept fitfully.

A little after midnight Angus, broad awake from the pain of his healing wound, heard a muffled commotion below in the main hall. A timber of the barricade fell to the floor. He started to his feet, seizing one of Nick's rifles that leaned against the wall in a corner—expecting momentarily to hear a wild shout of alarm. Instead, voices in argument came up the stairway, and presently the sound of boots approaching along the corridor. Angus sat down weakly upon the cot, leaning the heavy gun against the wall. The ancient door of the keep, in ruins upon its decayed and rusted hinges, swung open. In strode Nick, followed by Ali.

"Your Somali wouldn't take no for an answer. I told him you were havin' yourself a snooze but he was bound he'd see you right now. He came scratchin' at the barricade same as last night when he brung you in."

ANGUS lit the candle lantern that Mary Leonora had placed on the floor beside the cot. The dim light revealed Ali grinning happily, his perfect teeth gleaming like ivory, his white eyeballs shining. Distorted shadows coursed upon the oppo-

site wall like monstrous dream-figures. The Somali was plastered with dried mud; and the khaki suit—an old one discarded by his master—was in rents and tatters. Dangling from one hand was his water-gourd; and over his shoulder was a goat-skin sack knotted with a rawhide cord. He handed the full gourd to Angus, stepped back and stood at attention. Angus smiled at the torn and muddy sight.

"I knew you'd pop up, Ali. This water will be useful. You've done many things for me in three years—things that any sahib might be proud to have his gun-bearer do. But this is the best of them all. I shall not forget."

The Somali's eyes gleamed with satisfaction. This was great praise from one so guarded in his disposal of praise—from this quiet *gaytah,* the master who fought the elephant and the lion. But Ali was bursting with news. And this he would not mention until his master asked the direct question. He stood waiting.

"All right. Out with it," said Angus, who read the gun-bearer like so much print. "What are you hoarding so carefully in that goatskin?" And then aside to Nick: "Fresh meat for the wounded, most likely—stolen from the village."

Ali slung the skin bundle from his shoulder. He fumbled clumsily with the tie-string, gave it up, whipped out his curved knife,—Angus saw that it was covered with dry and caked blood,—cut the string with a quick slash. And—out upon the stone floor rolled the head that Angus had thought resembled the profile on an ancient Roman coin—the bald and shining patrician head of Floyd Rankin!

Angus stared, thunderstruck! Nick started forward—and then Angus dimly, through shocked nerves, heard the Somali speaking—and vaguely he knew that Ali was quoting him, word for word, in a parroty sing-song that was like a religious chant:



"I've killed rattlesnakes for pleasure," Taos observed, "but I'll forget your rattlesnake's heart and treat you like a human!"

"He is a very strong *shaitan, kufanoo* and powerful. So strong is this *shaitan* that sometimes, when he enters a person's heart—that person must be killed, as we kill the *jeeb,* the spotted hyena."

CHAPTER X

A STRONG night wind was blowing. Sudden flaws whipped through the slotted casement, and the candle in the

camp-lantern on the stone floor guttered and flickered, now burning brightly, now leaving the vaulted keep almost in darkness.

Angus, with a visible effort, pulled himself together. That sudden spectacle had been the most shocking sight he had ever beheld. The grotesque, eccentric bumping roll of the marble-white bald head, the almost droll expression of the clean-shaven features, the eyes—Mary Leonora must be spared the needless horror of that ghastly exhibit!

"Take that—thing—out! Out of sight—at once!"

The Somali, surprised and disappointed, lifted the ivory-white object with both hands and placed it dejectedly in the center of the goatskin. Angus explained, speaking in a jargon of Amharic, Arabic and English:

"Ali, this is the greatest of all your deeds. It is a mighty service to me, to these other Ferengies—yes, and to the world in general! But the Ferengi lady, she may come. She must not see this thing. Take it away quickly!"

WRAPPING his bundle with great care, Ali swung it again to his shoulder. Strange indeed were the ways of Ferengies! The head was clean. There was no blood, for he had washed it carefully at the creek below the village. And in spite of that they wouldn't have it around. But the deed had been approved. That was enough. He turned to obey; and Mary Leonora, eyes heavy with sleep, blinking in the candle-light, appeared in the doorway. She hurried to the side of Angus' cot, apparently without seeing anyone else in the room.

"Oh, thank God! It was a dream!" A pale hand was at her throat, fearfully. "My nerves, overwrought—but I thought you were in great pain. I must have dreamed that your wound opened. There was blood—oh, it was horrible." Angus took her hand gravely, and held it in a reassuring grip as he would the small hand of a frightened child. She became aware of the others for the first time, grew conscious of her appearance, hair falling in disordered waves to her waist—turned, confused to retreat. But Angus retained her hand in a firm and apparently unending grip—and just then Borama and Sallassy rushed pell-mell into the keep, hands filled with yellow metal rings.

"These we have found in the well! Oh, there is many mule-loads! It is gold!"

NICK and Taos and Mary Leonora stared blankly at each other. Not one of the three had so much as given a thought to the treasure—"gold sufficient to purchase the one halfe of the world"—since the development of hostilities. The object of their ill-fated expedition had not recurred to them after the swift and tragic happenings of the past two days. And now as they saw the two men holding handfuls of yellow rings—rings of soft, beaten gold some three inches in diameter, they had no feeling of elation, showed no sign of enthusiasm.

"Probably pure gold," Angus stated, only mildly interested. "Placer gold beaten into this convenient shape. Almost the identical size that old Ras Tessayah in Addis gave me for the ivory from my last trek. Abyssinian chiefs, if they have any gold, always keep it in this handy size, it seems—worth something like ten pounds sterling each."

None of the four so much as reached out a hand to examine the find. Mary Leonora observed sleepily: "I never expected to see gold—a great treasure—so casually treated. We've none of us the slightest interest in the stuff." And before she could ask the question that was uppermost in everyone's mind, and receive the disheartening answer from Sallassy, Taos spoke:

"You men get back and keep after that water, *pronto*. You're almost to the bottom now. By morning you'll sure hit her. No, don't stop to explain nothin'." He shut them off hastily and pushed the two toward the door: "Now tie into it!"

"W'at shall we do wi-ith the gold? There is much—oh, veree much—and it is mos' heavy."

"Oh, throw it out, like you do the rest of the dirt and sand. We don't give a damn what you do with it. But keep after that water."

Mary Leonora smiled wanly with lips dry and cracked. Angus, releasing her hand, reached down and lifted the water-gourd from the floor.

"Ali brought this in tonight. You must take a big drink now and sleep till morning. We are studying out a plan—"

She raised the gourd to her lips, obediently, like a child, drank sparingly and passed through the door, back to her own room. That small drink had been like

a touch of heaven to her water-craving tissues. She lay awake on the camp cot, it seemed, for hours. Her thoughts jumped from one thing to another with the most untiring rapidity. The powerful and menacing figure of Floyd Rankin rose ever before her tortured mind, relentless, ruthless as thirst, indomitable, unescapable; loathsome as her childhood idea of Satan himself. She thought too of the golden treasure lying at the bottom of the well and now being thrown aside unnoticed, unwanted, in the desperate search for water. The gold was even hateful, for its weight increased the difficulty of digging. And she remembered with a kind of wondering disgust that human beings had, since the dawn of history, fought, murdered, stolen and committed the most unthinkable atrocities for a handful of that bright metal!

She herself had brought Nick and Taos, those faithful, undaunted old souls, out here to die the most horrible of deaths—for gold. And Angus,—she hadn't yet talked with him about his reasons for being in this part of the country,—but she had an instinctive feeling that she was the cause, directly or indirectly. Those things bore down in an almost overpowering load upon her conscience. The fact that she had come seeking the gold for a fine, humanitarian purpose failed utterly to relieve her mind in its present pitiful condition. . . . . Mercifully, she fell into a deep sleep.

THE rising sun was shining through the narrow port when she awoke. A single long beam struck athwart the blanket on her cot. Wild pigeons were hurtling by on whistling wings; and the sound, coming in through the window spoke of peace, contentment and the healing sympathy of nature. It was some moments before the full realization of where she was came to her, and then she prayed fervently again for strength, for self-control, fingering the blanket nervelessly, hopelessly.

This would be the last day. The miracle, if it were to happen at all, must come today. Tomorrow she would not be here to greet that sun shining in through the casement, so jovially unconcerned.

She traced with dull finger the outline of its narrow path across the blanket. Its red light fell upon her hand in broken streak. The pale skin appeared, in that early glow, to be mottled and spotted, as if marked with the red blotches of disease.

With a stiff, sudden motion Mary Leonora sat bolt upright, her eyes staring down at the hand.

"Angus! Nick! Taos!" The cry was wildly hysterical.

Nick and Taos, fully dressed, and Angus—as he had leaped from his cot, startled at the cry, his arm in its sling, shoulder in its bandage—rushed into the room. Mary Leonora knew vaguely that they had not slept, that a council of war had been going on through the night.

"A way out! I've got it! I've got it!" Her cry rose triumphantly, a pæan of praise, inspiriting as a glimpse into the fabled fields of Elysium. The small hands beat the blanket lustily in an excess of uncontrollable eagerness. Her face was glowing. An ecstasy of sheer joy burned in her eyes; and then—as they watched, wondering—a thought, a remembrance, entered her mind that smothered all that glory, as the flame of a candle dies when it burns helplessly to the end. Her whole body seemed to shrink in upon itself as if the spirit were fading in death. Angus thought he had never witnessed anything so pitiful in all the days of his life: that swift descent from the heights, the very peaks of paradise, to the dark and haunted caverns of despair.

Angus stepped swiftly to her side and kneeling upon the stone floor, took the disheveled head in his arm and buried it tightly, protectingly, in his uninjured shoulder. A white bare arm went round his neck desperately, clinging with a force that sent a twinge of pain through the spear wound.

The two old cowboys looked at each other blankly—and discreetly tiptoed backward from the room.

IT was long before Mary Leonora lifted her head.

"That, I think," she said, "would have broken—my heart—if you had not—come to my rescue."

"What was it? Oh, but let's not talk about it, whatever it was. Mary Leonora, I want you to know—if anything happens to us,—that I—I have loved you since—" Angus blundered through the first speech of its kind he had ever attempted. The words were old and worn threadbare in the ancient life of the English tongue, but were so filled with tenderness and so vitally interesting to two persons that what he said is nobody else's business at all. And at the

end, Mary Leonora's head went back to his uninjured shoulder, where it remained for a long time.

When she looked up, there were tears, of what, for want of a better word, we may call shyness, upon her lashes.

"I thought," she said, smiling bravely, "that I had solved our problem. Oh, what a beautiful plan it was! I could hardly speak, it was so glorious. And then I remembered Floyd Rankin! My plan wont work with Floyd out there, you see—and when I realized it was all to no purpose, I think my heart almost stopped forever. I can't tell you—"

Angus straightened, keen as a hound on the scent.

She continued: "I can't tell you how utterly desolate that thought left me. The bottom dropped out of the world—for Floyd would see through it in a minute. You see, they wouldn't dare to come near enough to use their spears, and I pictured us marching out, striking terror to those savages. And then the thought of Floyd overturned my beautiful ship, and—" But as she gave her plan in detail, Angus leaped to his feet. His deep shout, victorious, booming through those ancient halls, brought Nick and Taos on the run.

"Gentlemen!" He looked ten years younger, strangely boyish, while at the same time a calm dignity surrounded him even in his disheveled condition.

"Gentlemen, I have the honor of presenting to you my future wife."

THE two white-haired men stopped in the doorway, haggard and worn from lack of sleep and water. They looked at first uncomprehending from one to the other.

"Many happy returns of the day!" Taos muttered formally after an interval. And Nick almost blurted:

"When and where do you plan to pull off them highly important matrimonial fandangoes, if I may inquire?" He just caught himself in time and coughed raucously instead.

Angus was almost bursting with the knowledge that he possessed.

"Gentlemen, we are about to issue forth from this sainted castle. We are about to sally out into God's blinkin' sunshine and twist the tail of one Ras Gootama, savage potentate. Mary Leonora has just contributed the brains, the how. And you and I, Taos and Nick, will follow her plan to the letter; for"—and he turned and looked down upon Mary Leonora—"Floyd Rankin is dead—unmistakably, undoubtedly and very intentionally—killed. Ali—saw him dead. There can be absolutely no mistake about it—"

"Oh, thank God!" And at that cry all the eagerness returned to her face. Again the small hands beat the blanket.

"Out! Everyone! While I dress!" She waved them from the room, her face radiant with the glow they had watched die there a short time before. She asked no details of Floyd Rankin's death. The very mention of his name was abhorrent to her, and they volunteered no information, but withdrew, Angus explaining, answering the rapid-fire questions of the two cowboys in joyous and confident enthusiasm.

SALLASSY was summoned; and he in turn called the men. Angus spoke to them, lined up around the wall of the vaulted keep, praising their steadfastness, complimenting them sincerely upon their uncomplaining devotion. He went on to explain that a plan had been evolved, a stratagem which, if they did their parts faithfully, would give them their one and only chance for life. He went into the plan in detail, emphasizing this point, stressing that. And when the full import of the idea registered, they raised such a clamor of wild rejoicing that two small bats, hanging from crannies in the arched ceiling, let go and zigzagged about the room, bewildered and panic-stricken.

Ali, swelling with pride in his master, stilled the noise by scornfully remarking:

"Me, I know all the time *gaytah* will find the way. When *gaytah* is ready to go anywhere, he goes. His god is strong. The *shaitan* is dead. It is nothing for *gaytah* to fool these savages!"

Angus silenced him.

"Ali, you are a bit off your bean, old top. This plan is the work of the lady—the Ferengi *sitt*—who has more magic at work in her head than a hundred men rolled into one."

Following the instructions of Angus, Ali jumped into action. Seizing the medicine chest, he pulled it from beneath the cot. Tearing loose the canvas cover, he scratched open the tin lid with clawlike fingers. The most startling flow of Arabic and Somali oaths fell from his lips in a steady stream. He shoved, pulled and cuffed the slower men about in a frenzy of haste, bossing and explaining the wishes of his master.

Borama, slow, faithful, methodical, did his part efficiently, crooning under his breath in a low, purring singsong that was like the mewing of a great cat.

Angus, who understood best the native mind, acted as stage manager. Nick and Taos gleefully, with many strange oaths, superintended the scene-shifting. Mary Leonora, dressed for the trail, came in, and sitting on the floor in a corner out of the way, suggested, criticized, approved, as shall ever be an author's God-given right when his play is rehearsed.

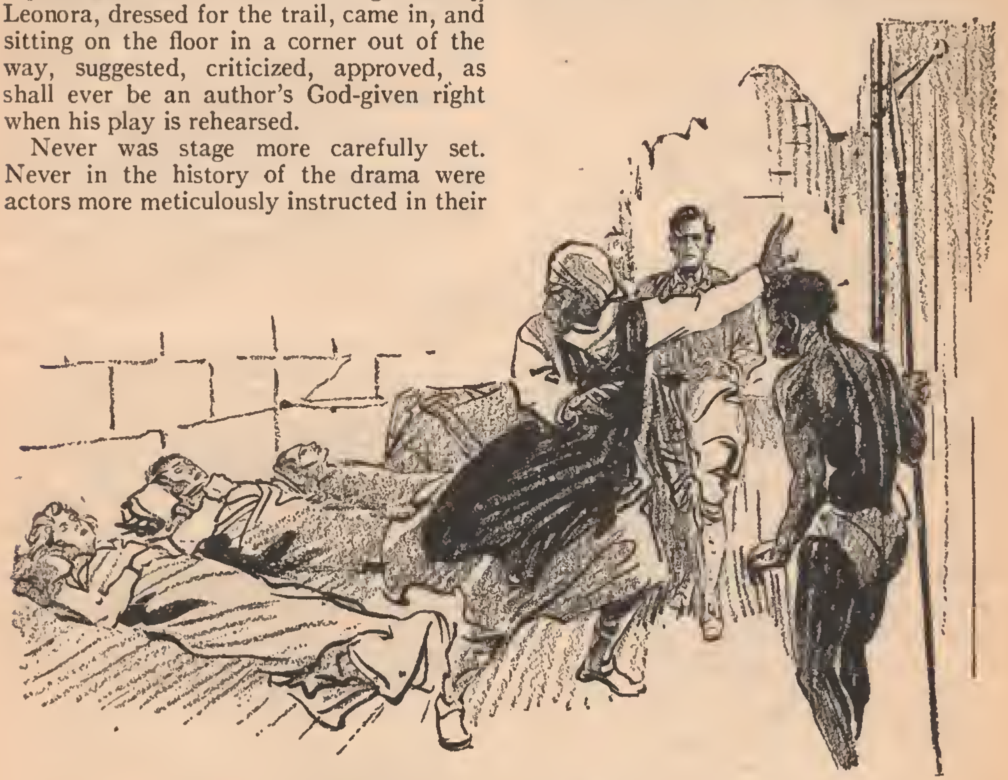
Never was stage more carefully set. Never in the history of the drama were actors more meticulously instructed in their parts. This was to be a one-act play—a single scene upon which would depend the life of every human being in that ancient castle. If it "went over" with its savage audience, it would be a comedy, a glorious immortal farce. If failure attended the first and only performance, it would automatically change to a gruesome tragedy—the end of the world for that little company!

When all was in readiness, Borama was ordered to see to the mule-packing, in anticipation of a speedy exit from the great sally-port.

"But what," he inquired, mildly surprised, "will the sahibs do with the gold?"

Mary Leonora broke into peals of laughter. Angus roared and slapped his leg with his good hand. Taos straightway fell to abusing Nick to save his own face—a twinkle in his bloodshot eyes.

"You're a fine old specimen of human zoölogy! Here I herd you halfway round the world by railroad, steamboat and jackass, to Prester John's old stampin' ground, just to declare a dividend on the spoils and I find you potterin' around in



A yell of terror split the air, as Ras Gootama's envoy clawed at the door in an ecstasy of fear at the unseen terror.

private theatricals like a *pinto* clown. 'Gold sufficient to purchase the one-halfe of the world' kickin' around loose under your old moccasins plumb overlooked and forgot in your impresario stage revels. Aint you ashamed? Mr. Marr, would you kindly prance down with this here faithful mule-skinner and inoculate his cogitations with the idea of loadin' all that eighteen-carat swag them pore mules can pack? That is, if such labors wont interfere too much with your soobrette ambitions!"

A SHORT time thereafter, Sallassy mounted the wall above the wide sally-port. Carefully coached, he made a most heartrending harangue. His words were repeated, relayed by Ras Gootama's scouts and sentries from their places of conceal-

ment near the castle. Angus, watching through Mary Leonora's binoculars, could see a crowd gather upon a far hilltop. A black-bearded Abyssinian on a mule sat proudly in the center and remained calmly listening throughout the speech. Angus knew from the great concourse of warriors surrounding him that this would be Ras Gootama himself. Sallassy mournfully shouted his woes in Amharic:

"These words are the words of my Ferengies. We are without water. Our bones are dry as dust within us." Angus, standing at the casement, muttered: "And that's no joke, either." Sallassy went on:

"All will soon die. We have fought the great Ras Gootama, and we have been beaten. We are ready to surrender. If Ras Gootama will send one of his chiefs, we will talk. Perhaps Ras Gootama will permit some of us to march out safely if others give themselves up alive for the pleasure and entertainment of the great Ras. It is all we can do."

With nerves at the breaking-point, Angus watched the great crowd upon the hill. This was the weakest link in the strategic chain. If Ras Gootama refused to treat—

Angus turned, a look of infinite relief shining in his face. He permitted himself to breathe naturally for the first time in many agonizing seconds. His voice was calm, vibrating with confidence:

"Just as I hoped. Here come a chief and two retainers! Thank God for Ras Gootama's double-dealing propensities. This chief will be instructed to promise immunity to half the caravan if the other half gives up and marches out first. The idea being, of course, to divide us. Then all could—and would—be butchered without a moment's hesitation."

Mary Leonora could not control the trembling that seized upon her limbs. There were so many things that might yet go wrong! But the touch of Angus' uninjured arm about her shoulders and the sight of his bronzed face, cool, steady as the hills, smiling down, brought the color to her cheeks as it roused the courage within her.

INDISTINCTLY, with the naked eye, could be seen three men descending the far hill. Deliberately they stalked through the grass and began climbing the slope to the ancient fortress.

"Them three ignoramuses is due for the shock of their lives when they get here," Taos remarked.

And Nick returned: "They're comin' in a heap slower than they'll go out!"

It seemed an hour to the watchers on the walls before the three, an old chief in black burnous and white pantaloons, with two almost naked spear-carrying retainers, reached the barricaded entrance. And during that period the mighty force surrounding Ras Gootama stood outlined upon the hilltop. To the north, east and west other groups watched—silently, expectantly; a ring of spears around the ancient castle.

At the barricade Angus and Sallassy stood waiting. The three were admitted. In the great stone hall where generations before, had stood men-at-arms, arquebusiers and mailed knights of Portugal, Angus addressed the envoys. He spoke slowly in his limited Amharic in tones of quiet hopelessness:

"Come. We will show you the condition—the terrible condition—of our party."

The chief made no reply. He was the soul of cold hauteur. Angus led the way up the stone stairs, Sallassy, the chief and his retainers following. The group traversed the corridor in stately silence. Angus' heels striking the stone floor made the only sound. At the closed door of the old keep Angus paused. He turned impressively; a great sadness and pity for his companions shone in his face:

"The favorite chief of Ras Gootama will now see a most harrowing sight—" With the words he pushed open the decrepit door. The party stepped through, and Sallassy closed it behind; the ancient hinges, rusted almost to nothing, protesting shrilly.

Ras Gootama's barbarian envoy gazed with satisfaction. He saw two white men and a white woman lolling weakly on the floor wrapped in blankets; faces blotched and disfigured with dark, livid spots, eyes vacant, staring at the opposite wall. Two caravan men lay rolled in blankets in another corner, unmoving, eyes fixed in a trancelike gaze upon the vaulted ceiling. The chief, a sudden, disquieting suspicion entering his mind, drew back toward the door. Angus spoke gently, innocently:

"You see, we cannot fight the warriors of Ras Gootama—and at the same time the ravages of the deadly pestilence—*smallpox!* Even Ferengies cannot do—"

But a yell of terror split the air, as Ras Gootama's envoy clawed at the door in an ecstasy of fear. He was in the same small room with the dreaded scourge of all savage



Mary Leonora and Angus stopped for a last view of the ancient ruin, rearing proud turrets and circular keep high above the surrounding countryside.

races—the unseen terror that stalks by day and by night wiping out whole villages wherever it fastens with its mysterious invisible fangs! He wanted only to get out.

A moment later the three emissaries were flying down the stone stairs and out through the barricade.

TAOS yawned, stretching his arms aloft, rising to his feet.

"Ho, hum! And to think that a little iodine mixed with a few brains—yourn, Mary Leonora—hath power to soothe the savage breast! I've heard that the pen is a whole lot mightier than the tomahawk, but I never had no idea a dab of iodine could whip ten thousand spears!"

"Taos, did you get that screech he let out?" said Nick with great interest and admiration, springing to his feet and peering through the narrow casement. "Old Geronimo himself couldn't beat that. What a jim-dandy yelp to drive cattle with! There he goes, on a high-tailed lope—like a Siwash racin' to a dog-feast!"

Angus and Mary Leonora took turns watching through the glass. They saw the three envoys plowing through the long grass, stumbling and blundering down the slope in panic-stricken haste, and they watched the trio fighting their way desperately up the side of the far hill, by this time laboring for breath. They saw the old man, his burnous flying in the wind, burst through the ring of warriors surrounding Ras Gootama, now dismounted. Angus, holding the glass, could see that potentate step forward to meet his envoy and to know the reason for such undignified haste. With the glass to his eyes Angus called over his shoulder:

"There! Our late friend has arrived. He flops down, head to the ground at Gootama's feet. . . . . What! Well, I'm damned—I never expected that—even from such a savage! The cowardly butcher! The—"

"What is it, Angus? What did he do? Tell us—quick!" Mary Leonora tugged at his arm.

There was a deadly sternness in Angus' face as he took the glass down and turned around.

"That black beast whipped out his scimitar and cut down, with one terrible sweep, that poor devil, that bearer of evil tidings—probably for daring to come into the presence after being exposed to smallpox—exposed to our harmless little iodine stains! Oh, for a shot—just one glimpse of that old devil over the sights!"

ONCE again, after its sleep of three centuries those ancient halls bustled with the preparations for a sortie, an evacuation. The men were almost beside themselves with eagerness to get to the cool stream in the valley. The mules, many of them weak and tottering under their loads, seemed to sense that the end of their dry

torture was at hand, and weak as they were, crowded almost unmanageably to be first out.

Ten mules were packed with the yellow shining rings. The rest carried only the most essential camp equipment, which Nick and Borama had cut down to an absolute minimum. Each man was allowed to carry, for himself, up to fifty pounds—or more than ten thousand dollars in treasure. The remainder was piled at the mouth of the old dry well. Dirt, clay, stones and gold together were then thrown in, and a rubble of boulders pushed in on top.

Angus and Taos, with Mary Leonora between them, stood in the great hall watching the removal of the barricade. At the last moment Mary Leonora, with all the grace of a vanished day, dropped a curtsey to the ancient walls.

"To the stout heart," she murmured with deep sincerity, "the valiant spirit who visioned and built this old pile."

The sun was swinging toward the west, and shadows of hills and faint blue mountains were beginning to lengthen when the caravan crossed the threshold of the wide sally-port and marched down the causeway.

A WILD, disorganized clamor rose from neighboring hill-tops. Spears were waved aloft and shaken furiously in a gesture of impotent rage, the sun flashing from the long, cruel blades in bright streams of light. But there was no movement to close in. In fact, as the long line of mules swung toward the west, the Sudan border,—civilization, the protection of a European flag,—the hills in that direction became vacant; the spearmen withdrew in haste, running to the right and to the left, intent upon leaving a full half-mile between their own precious carcasses and the grim specter of disease that they knew—or thought they knew—stalked unseen in the midst of the caravan.

From the group surrounding Ras Gootama there came three or four shots—futile and wild.

"Talk about optimists," Taos remarked with disgust. "The idea of wastin' lead at a half-mile! I reckon, anyway, most of 'em couldn't hit a house from the inside with doors and winders locked."

Nick observed: "One would be Ras Gootama's gun. Then, Angus says, cousin Floyd had two and a six-shooter—which he aint apt to need—and with the two they confisticated from Angus when they tied him up, that makes five rifles, a six-shooter and a no-good machine-gun. But there aint five men in that whole outfit who savvy the virtues of a hind sight. And there aint danger enough to scare a gun-shy pup. I'm glad the machine-gun's out of whack, though. Ali, where in hell is that creek? I can't spit till I prime my throat. She's dry as a last year's bird-nest."

Angus, turning in the saddle, watched expectantly for a sight of Ras Gootama. He hoped fervently that the now well-armed tyrant would attempt a shot or two from somewhere within range. But that astute potentate had no such intentions. The terror of that dread scourge that stalks by day and by night, wiping out whole villages, was too real. And when Ras Gootama, after firing from the ridiculous distance of a half-mile, was sprayed with dirt by an answering shot from Taos, the report of the prowess of the two white-haired Ferengies was too much. The tales of their magic with the short *tabanjahs*—those little guns whose rapid voices were like the chattering of a herd of *jingaros* (baboons) when they see the lion lying in the long grass—were too impressive to be investigated. And then, there was also the weird and alarming sorcery of the solemn chant that one white-hair always sang so successfully to his god while in battle.

Ras Gootama wisely decided that he could not compete in a long-range rifle duel. And now that spears were as useless as stalks of waving grass, and the three-legged assassin-gun lay sick upon the ground and refused to speak, he ordered a retirement to the village, cheering his checkmated warriors with the promise of an early raid into Tigre. Knowing his men, he braced their drooping spirits with lavish consolation: there would be many slaves, great herds of cattle, clouds of women captives and much amusing and easy slaughter. Life was not devoid of all pleasure in the final analysis. . . . .

Mary Leonora, glancing back, pointed to the frowning old pile upon the hill.

"Angus—look! What is that—that thing above the wall? There, raised high on what appears to be a pole. That round thing that shines and glistens in the sun?"

With a keen and understanding, if not actually approving, glance at Ali, marching impassive by his side, Angus lied like a gentleman:

"That? Oh, some tomfoolery of a na-

tive charm that Ali stuck up on the point of a spear."

Ali volunteered, in a mixture of offended dignity and pride:

"Master, it is the head of the *shaitan*, himself."

"See," said Angus convincingly, "he calls it the devil himself. He's a bit superstitious, is Ali. And now for the water!"

IT was a happy caravan that dashed headlong through the straggling acacia trees that lined the bank of the stream and drank—at first sparingly, carefully, but later with deep and satisfying abandon. And then Mary Leonora, seated upon the bank listening to that gentle gurgling, the pleasant talkativeness of water running over stones, about which she had dreamed so much in the past two days, lifted up her clear contralto voice in pure thanksgiving:

"Flow gently, sweet Afton, among thy green braes
Flow gently, I'll sing thee a song in thy praise—"

And as the last notes of the old Scotch song died away among the trees, Angus looked down upon her, his eyes frankly swimming. Taos, to hide what he considered womanly weakness in himself and to work loose the lump in his throat that he would have called, "a cow's cud," shouted some useless order to Sallassy. Nick roundly cursed a mule, for doing nothing more awful than climbing the opposite bank.

An hour later, upon the top of a far hill, Mary Leonora and Angus, riding in the rear, stopped for a last view of the old castle. The round and smiling sun was dipping low toward the horizon, and the ancient ruin, rearing proud turrets and circular keep high above the surrounding countryside, was, at the moment, resplendent in the red glow.

Angus thoughtfully quoted:

"Now are our brows bound with victorious wreaths,
Our bruised arms hung up for monuments,
Our stern alarums changed to merry meetings,
Our dreadful marches to delightful measures;
Grim-visaged war hath smoothed his wrinkled front."

THERE is much more that might be told, especially of the triumphal entry two months later into Khartum. How Angus and Mary Leonora, riding side by side at the head of the caravan, encountered a detachment of Sudani troops. How they were halted in the middle of a main thoroughfare, the black soldiers, Beni Shangul, Hadendowa and Kababish, with the knife-slashes of their tribal marks upon cheek and temple, presenting arms in rigid line. And how their young white officer rushed forward in unsoldierly haste to grasp Angus by the hand and exclaim in strong Scotch brogue:

"Angus McPherson! *The* McPherson! By the beard of the Prophet! What magic brings such a great sahib to our swelterin' midst! Mon! But I've a cable from home about you! A month old. Thought I might have to sear-r-rch for you in yon bloomin' waste. Ah'll coom to the hostel-ery. Half hour-r! On duty the noo—'Ten-*tion!*" And the native pipers struck up the stirring march, "The Cock o' the North," and away they went down the street, bagpipes braying triumphantly, the youthful subaltern swinging along in the lead, his kilts swaying jauntily, his sporan waving in the wind.

BUT that evening, at a dinner in his honor given by the officers of the garrison, with Mary Leonora seated at his right, and Taos and Nick opposite, Angus was taken completely by surprise. For the cablegram had been mislaid, purposely, until that auspicious occasion. Colonel Traylor rose impressively and read the month-old message from Scotland:

"'Notify Captain Angus McPherson, late of the Black Watch, now somewhere in Africa, that upon the death of his uncle Cluny McPherson, of Gleneyre, the chieftainship of clan McPherson with all appurtenances this day falls to him. Signed, Roderick McPherson.'"

The irrepressible subaltern of the marching contingent leaped to his feet:

"A toast! To the new chieftain of an old clan. 'Touch not the cat but a glove!'"

Angus rose in reply:

"Gentlemen!" Raising his glass: "To the future mistress of Gleneyre—Lady McPherson-to-be."

With a roar that shook the rafters, every man was on his feet. Angus reached down, and taking Mary Leonora's hand, slipped upon a finger a band of gold, somewhat crudely hammered out, but the best to be had in the sun-baked bazaars of the Mahdi's old stronghold, Khartum.

THE END.



"I can't give you my word, sir! It depends on—" And Coan faltered into silence.

There's a Hen On

By
HOLMAN DAY

A joyous tale of sea-faring and shore-adventure, by the man who wrote "The Rider of the King Log" and many another good one.

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

ON board coastguard cutter *Ogunquit*—cutter just off patrol and tied up at her base wharf, Longport, taking on fresh supplies and having boilers blown and tubes cleaned.

Lieutenant Brady, executive officer, coming by way of the wardroom, tapped on the sacred door of the Old Man's spacious quarters far aft, and entered on invitation. Captain Tomson was engaged on reports, with the assistance of the ship's writer.

"Gunner Coan is leaving us, sir!" reported the executive officer.

"I know it! Shore leave for two weeks!" snapped out the Old Man.

Brady hastened to soothe an impatience evoked by what had seemed to be unnecessary information. "I mean to say, sir, he's quitting the service. He's just been telling me. His enlistment is up at the end of the fortnight."

"That's nonsense! Can't let him go!"

"It's what I've told him, sir. There isn't another man in the service who can match him handling explosives."

"Send him aft! Quick!"

Brady marched forward and gave the orders to Gunner Ward Coan in the latter's quarters. Coan, dolled in a brand-new rig, ready for shore, was strapping a huge leather bag, also glaringly new.

"You're all dressed up, and now you've got somewhere to go, Gunner. That's *aft*—and in a hurry!" Brady grinned broadly. "You're in for a razzing. I've tipped off the Old Man."

Coan, now "on his own" once more, slipped out of the harness of discipline and kicked his heels in profane and resentful protest.

Brady's grin persisted. "Oh, say now! You don't think I'd let a chap like you slip out by the back way, do you? I hope the Old Man kicks the foolishness out of you. March aft, Gunner!"

IN the sunshine on deck Coan was a resplendent figure. His new suit had knife-like creases wherever a crease was demanded. His new tan shoes glittered with polish. Tie, socks, and handkerchief carefully cat-eared above the edge of his outside breast pocket, all matched in hue of violet. His fedora hat rode jauntily on one side of his head. His apprehensive visage did not match the rest of his glory. He knew exactly how the Old Man would pitch into him.

And the Old Man, shaking his eyeglasses at the end of a cord, fully came up to expectations. It was praise of Coan's qualifications—but it was praise with an awful backhanded bang in the matter of such a man deserting the service. Especially was the gunner an expert in the

ticklish task of blowing up derelicts—and Captain Tomson bore down on that point.

"Now I want your word that you'll come back at the end of two weeks and sign up," he concluded.

Gunner Coan stood very straight and saluted. "It's like having a badge of honor pinned on me, sir, what you've said. But I can't give you that bounden word. You see, sir, it depends on—" Coan's anxiety to smooth over a situation was betraying him into too much of a confession, and he faltered into embarrassed silence.

"Oh, I see!" shot Captain Tomson with all of Gunner Coan's accuracy of aim. The Old Man had been inspecting the gunner's garb. "There's a girl in this! Depends on her, eh?"

Though the gunner did not reply, his face and the flush under his tan spoke for him.

Figuratively, the Captain took Coan by the heels and shook him upside down; something which the Old Man wanted to know dropped out when he brusqued: "Where are you going, Coan?"

"Wass Island, sir!"

"Very well! That's all—for *now!* Safe trip!"

The Old Man turned to his papers and Coan backed out of the presence. But before he had gone ten paces on deck, the ship's writer hailed him over the hood of the wardroom hatch: "Captain Tomson wants to see you again!"

Gunner Coan had been puzzled by the summary style of dismissal, and by the inquiry regarding his destination.

Again he confronted the Old Man.

"Wass Island, you say, Coan? I wish you'd make your leave count in the way of the service. There's a bootleggers' nest down there—somewhere in that region. No chance for us to get at it, operating from the sea. On shore, while you're there, you may be able to turn the trick."

The gunner's silence suggested a balky mood.

"Don't care for the job! Is that it?" snapped the Captain.

"I aint condoning bootlegging, sir! But if I'm sent to—if I'm put to—well, it's my old stamping-ground down there on Wass. To go back there, sneaking and snooping, maybe catching old friends, it's like to be—to be—"

"Well, out with it! Say what you were wanting to say—just as you feel like saying it!"

It was a vicious push of a query and Coan toppled into frank speech: "It's going to be a pleasant vacation—like hell it is!"

"Your mind is relieved now, eh?"

"It was a bad break I made, sir! But that was what I was wanting to say—and I obeyed orders from you in saying it out!"

"Too bad you balk at other orders! But perhaps I couldn't expect much from you—down there. They say love is blind, anyway!" With that sarcasm he waved the gunner out.

Lieutenant Brady, on deck, whirled at sound of the creaking new shoes and flashed that aggravating grin of his into the flushed countenance. "Red flag? Danger! Going to blow up, Gunner?"

"I did blow up! I've got a hell of a temper, sir—don't rasp me any more!"

"Oh, I know all about your temper! But now you have shot the charge and"—Brady winked knowingly—"from now on, in the place where you're going, all so merry, hey? I'm guessing, Gunner!" As the Old Man had done, he gave the new rig a significant up and down.

"You're better on courses than you are on guesses, sir." Coan's scowl deepened and his flush was the rusty red of unsettled soul disturbance.

"Don't go away with a grudge against me, Gunner. I've only been over-anxious to keep you in the service."

Coan responded to this kindliness. "Don't get me wrong, sir. You're more'n all right with me—and always have been that way. But I aint heading toward any merry stuff—not this trip! I'm on my way to put a charge under something! And when I give it the spark—" He went forward, flinging an expressive hand above his head.

EIGHT passengers arrived at Wass Island on the gasoline packet *Effort,* ferry from the main.

Seven of the eight were city folks, unmistakably so—summer boarders. They were blandly cheerful, looking ahead to the contentment of a vacation.

The eighth passenger was Ward Coan; his lower jaw was tightly set, his eyes somber, and above the eyes were the creases of a scowl. In all his demeanor he registered combative resolution; he strode up the wharf with the manner of a champion entering an arena.

Breaking out of a group of observing

loafers, a man scuttled away in advance of Coan.

At the head of the dock bulked a large building; it shouldered hoggishly into the road, leaving only a narrow lane as the approach to the wharf.

It was Wass style, that insolent monopoly of a thoroughfare. The Wass family had its clutch on almost everything on the island, one way or another. If anything wriggled rebelliously in that clutch, the strangle-hold tightened and that was the end of the insurrection. They who were held in thrall were avidly eager to tender slavish service. So the man who had spotted the bodeful Coan hurried into the big building with a warning to Alvin Wass—young Alvin, he was called, though he was all of forty, and looked it.

Alvin was puttering around in the hardware section of the general store—an emporium stocked with everything "from a clap o' thunder to a sheet o' flypaper," so the islanders put it, without daring to make more pointed reference to the fact that the Wass family hogged all the island trade in all branches.

The sycophant popped his warning: "Ward Coan's come back—just landed from the boat—he's coming up the wharf heavy on his heels."

Young Alvin spun around and picked up a stovelid lifter; immediately he discarded that as too puny a weapon and selected the heaviest iron poker from a rack.

"That's the idee, young Alvin! Hit him for keeps!" encouraged the man, with a snicker.

Wass retreated behind a counter, holding the poker in plain sight.

COAN strode in; critically and contemptuously he surveyed Alvin at bay behind the rampart. "You carry guns in stock. Sorry you haven't had time to load a couple!"

"You're back here looking for more trouble—that's what!"

"I'm owing you something, and I'm back here to pay it! A fellow's home place aint worth a damn to him unless he stands all square in it. That's all for now! It's a fair warning. Stand by to get what's coming to you!"

And Coan tramped out of the store.

The warning emissary strove further with his kind of helpfulness. "That's a threat from a hellion against the biggest man on this island. Better delegate me to git up a bee. We'll lick him good and plenty, tie him up and take one o' your napthy boats and heave him onto the main."

"And then he'll bounce back here—and the harder you heave him, the quicker he'll bounce," stated Wass sourly.

"Mebbe so!" agreed the citizen, eager to flatter the other's opinions. "And I'll bet you've already thought up a better way."

"All but the details," stated the monarch of the island. He restored the poker to stock. "I've known as how Coan would come raving back here some day. So I've given thought to how he can be so everlastingly licked he'll go away this time and never come back. All but the details, as I've said. They'll have to depend on his moves."

This was unusually confidential talk from young Alvin. The man squirmed obsequiously, like a dog getting a pat. Then he leaned over the counter and blurted, face and tone anxious, "Let me have four packages o' raisins and two yeast cakes."

Wass's countenance was as hard as the sheet-iron stove against which he kicked in sudden ire. "Look-a-here, Trufant! I've been easy with you on that grocery bill you've run up. But I aint going to trust you for any more tippling ingrediencies! I'm shutting down on you, just as I'm shutting down on all the others on this island."

"I thought I was standing in a little speck diff'rent!" whined the other. "I've just run to you about Coan—and I'll watch him and keep running. Dad-ram it, young Alvin, I'm in a turrible state o' mind and body, 'less I have a hen on."

"There are too many hens on around here. You critters are keeping tee'd up from mornin' till night. But"—Wass scratched his nose—"I do need a little help about Coan, and I'll favor *you*." He proceeded to the grocery department, Trufant at his heels.

The phrase "hen on" required no footnote of explanation on Wass Island. Every secret boozer had some variety of mash hidden away in cellar or shed, and strolled about exultant and reeking with strange odors when the "hatching" was completed and the "hen had come off the nest."

Old Sawt Barter's latest hen was just off. He had been sampling liberally and was in an effusive state of mind which in-



"If you'd be sensible and load up with this, you'd skedaddle to the Wrenn house and gallop away with the girl!" urged old Sawt.

clined him to view all mankind with bland affection.

He stopped Ward Coan just outside the door of the Wass store and tried to hug him. "Gor-rate it, Wardie boy, I've al'ays stood out ag'inst 'em all and said you'd come back here, no matter what kind of a cloud you went away under. Of course, when a feller like *you* gits lickered up—"

"That'll be enough on that point! Is that damnation lie about me still sticking on?"

"But you wouldn't 'a' done what you done unless—"

THE glare in the gunner's hard eyes proved too much for old Sawt's alcoholic benignity; he stuttered into silence. He took a cautious side-glance at the Wass store. "Guess I'd better post you a leetle mite, Ward. About *him*—in there! Come along o' me!"

"All right! I was meaning to hunt you up, anyway, to get all the items to date," admitted Coan. "They couldn't make a newspaper pay on this island so long's you're alive and keep that tongue wagging."

They went to Barter's cobbler-shop, a little way up the one street of the hamlet.

Old Sawt prudently bolted the door by which they entered and, smacking his moist lips gustfully, beckoned Coan to follow into the back room. "Just had a hen come off, sonny! She sartinly done herself proud!"

Coan entered the back room, but he pushed away the tin pannikin which his host had proffered after dipping it into a stone crock. "Nix on that stuff!" he demurred.

"Oh, I s'pose you coastguarders have the pick out of all the good toodle-orum you grab in," stated old Sawt with a side-glance of envy and a flash of spite. He quaffed his brew and added, "That's what young Alvin says about you!"

"And keeps saying a whole lot more, hey?"

"Sure! Makes it his business, whamming *you!* Says you've been raising p'tickler hell, drinking and whooping it up ever sence ye left Wass—with a girl in ev'ry port. And sees to it that it all gits to Maida Wrenn," asserted the old man, dipping again into the crock. "Guess she has finally come 'round to where she's willin' to marry him. That's the say-so!"

Coan's eyes gleamed through slits and his jaw muscles were ridged. He con-

trolled retort and allowed the old man to babble.

"Ye know, Wardie, a girl is only a girl. There's that teetotal, cold-water aunt of hers al'ays a-dinging at Maida—and cold water will wear away a stone, they say!" Old Sawt dumped another dipperful down his gullet and giggled at the joke. "And there's what young Alvin keeps passing out about you. And there's the gad-awful, red-blazes ruckus that night you broke loose from Wass Island—with you chasing young Alvin in circles and a mob chasing you and—"

"If I had caught him, the damnation jackrabbit, I'd 'a' killed him!" raged Gunner Coan. "And he owns 'em, body and soul, on this island—that's why they mobbed me. Now I've come back to get him—and I'll sure get him!"

"He still owns 'em, body and soul, remember that!" warned Sawt, skimming scum off the brew and slatting the orts out of the pannikin. "If you go to gitting lickered up again and—"

"Damn *you!* And everybody else who says I'd had a drop to drink that night! I was crazy mad—that's my style! They ought to know it here by this time."

"But young Alvin and the aunt have finally got it into Maida's mind as how it was licker," boldly persisted old Sawt. "A girl is only a girl, as I've said. And since you've been a yo-ho sailor, a-roving with the sports, it's been easy to believe anything else, no matter what. And I guess Maida's gitting plumb tired o' pot-walloping in the kitchen for them summer boarders she and her aunt is taking in. There was a boat-load of 'em come over with you today. You had a chance to see 'em and hear 'em talk. What was they talking about, hey?"

"About the appetite the sea air was giving 'em!" confessed Coan grouchily.

"There ye have it! And why shouldn't a pretty girl git away from a hot stove and take it easy from now on, resting in a hammock on the piazzy of the Wass mansion? To my way o' thinking, Maida has stuck it out longer'n most girls would —with the richest man on the island a-begging and a-coaxing. All the other girls is a-fishing for him. Why shouldn't Maida heave in and hook him?"

"And catch a damnation sculpin? She sha'n't do it!"

"I dunno as what kind of a fancy fish you're classing your own self, sonny! But I guess it's gone so far with the sculpin that Maida wont yank her bait away from him, even if *you* come swimming along."

"Well, I'm going to swim along just the same," declared Coan. He picked up the big leather bag which he had been tugging about with him.

"Listen, Wardie!" murmured old Sawt, winking slyly, "haint ye brought some o' that clear quill stuff that you fellers git a-holt of so easy?"

"I've got a good mind to bang this bag over your bean," raged Coan, his unstable temper tripped.

"Huh! You don't dast to resk it!" scoffed the old man, aggravatingly incredulous. "Bottles break blamed easy! Oh, wa-a-all, go ahead and keep your licker, and *I'll* hang onto some things you ought to know for your own help."

In no friendly spirit, but with ireful intent to spike the mouth of old Sawt, Coan opened the bag and flung the contents about recklessly, displaying only the usual gear of a man on his travels. He held the open, empty bag under the inquisitor's nose, set palm against the back of old Sawt's head and rammed his nose down between the bag's jaws. "Sniff, peek and pry, damn ye! *Now* what do you say?"

"I'll say," remarked the old man, ducking away from the controlling hand, "that I aint going to advise ye no longer to save your temper special for them as deserves it. Go ahead and slop it all around—ye wont never run out o' stock!"

Coan replaced his belongings in the bag, maintaining a sullen silence.

HE strode up the street and stamped into the village tavern, giving Landlord Wes Horsely only a surly grunt when the latter plucked a rusty pen from its sheath in a wrinkled potato, tendering the pen and swinging around the register-book for the new guest.

"Still finding coastguarding all it's cracked up to be?" queried the boniface, combining a grin and a wink.

Coan, combating this new display of skepticism regarding the honor of the service, dealt in action instead of speech. He raised his bag high and slammed it over the little office counter into a corner.

Horsely ducked and for a moment had the horrified look of one who expected to hear a crash of glass.

"Any more remarks to make?" demanded the gunner truculently.

"Didn't know I was remarking in any way so as to stir that temper of yours."

"You know damn' well you was getting in the usual slur at the coastguard service! I'm warning you and all others on this island to lay off'm that stuff."

Horsely was manifestly silenced, but one of two men who were loafing in the office spoke out. "Seem to be pretty touchy, you coastguard fellers! Must be a mighty sharp point to that tack you're setting on!"

Coan whirled about and surveyed the speaker and his companion. They were tough-looking huskies, strangers; he remembered all the natives of Wass.

"Speaking to me, I take it?"

"Ye-ah! To you!"

When the gunner doubled his fists and advanced toward them, they stood up, but the spokesman demurred. "I don't see any need of a little joke starting a fight, Mister!" he said pacifically.

"If that's your idea of a joke," said Coan, edging his words between his teeth, "you'd best label the next joke you think of and send it on to me with a thirty-days' written notice as to what it is. That'll be time for me to think it over before I drop around to have a laugh with you."

"Thanks! That's O. K. with us," returned the man stiffly. He and his companion walked out of the office, taking no more chances with this firebrand arrival.

"Who has been monkeying around in old Cap Kidd's private burying-ground on this island?" Coan sarcastically inquired of Horsely. "Whoever it was, he didn't pick and chose in digging up pirates!"

"Them two is cap'n and mate of young Alvin's sailing packet. He's shipping his cannery goods to Boston in his own boat nowadays. Now looky here, Ward," appealed Horsely in the spirit of an old friend, "your temper never got you nothing but trouble in days back. Now you're home again, why not soften up?"

"I'd like to soften, Wes! Really hope I'm going to be able to do it. That is, after I settle certain matters. But there's one thing that worries me in that line—about softening, I mean!"

"What is it?" asked the landlord, eagerly seeking a confidence.

"I'll tell you if you wont gossip about it, like as is done on this island most of the time."

"Mum as a clam—that's me!" protested Horsely, slashing his forefinger across his throat.

"I've got to board here with you for a spell—and your grub may petrify me. That's what I mean!"

COAN proceeded to act in other matters while his courage was keyed up.

When he started up the road, walking toward the old Captain Wrenn mansion on the hill, his pace brisk, he was well aware that the eyes of the village were upon him.

But Maida's aunt appeared to him at the front door and asked icily and quite loudly enough for the boarders to hear—grinning city folks loafing on the veranda: "How do you dare show up on this island again, Mister Rummy?" As organizer and perpetual president of the Wass Women's Teetotal Warriors, Miss Cylla Wass believed in militant tactics—in quick assault and no compromise.

There had been no profit for Coan at the front door. He backed away from the forbidding frontage of the spinster. He did not reply to her. The ears of those listening city folks looked to him as big as the *Ogunquit's* ventilators.

Nor was there profit for Coan at the back door, to which he hurried. It was open for air to cool the kitchen. Maida Wrenn did give him one swift look before she darted into concealment. Her face was prettily flushed, but her haste in getting out of his sight suggested that the flush did not indicate delight, but had been roused by the hot stove within instead of by the flaming lover without.

Then Miss Cylla appeared and slammed the door.

The goading impulse which hurried Gunner Coan down the hill was the resolve to gallop into the Wass emporium and pound young Alvin into insensibility and then yank out that tongue which had been so persistently and maliciously busy at the Wrenn house.

However, at the foot of the hill Coan called himself a damned fool for thinking of pitching in like a veritable rowdy and simply proving Wass' case for the liar.

It was near dinner-time and he swung off the street and into the tavern.

Horsely had set the guest's bag out into the floor and he pointed to it when Coan came in. "Grab onto your cussed volucus and hiper your boots out o' here! I aint taking none of your lip about my

grub; and I've crossed your name off'm my register."

Coan yanked the pen out of the potato and signed his name again, splattering ink. He picked up his bag and mounted the stairs leading to the upper story. A door was slammed in the distance and the sound indicated that Coan had picked out his room and was definitely located.

"Be ye letting him run your hotel for ye, Wes?" sarcastically queried a loafer in the office.

"Yessir, just the same as I'd let a royal Bengal striped tiger or a hipperotamus run it till I could think up a sensible way of gitting the animile out and not wreck the place doing it!"

"Was he born with that temper o' his?"

"Not by a damsite!" Horsely, with typical Yankee eccentricity, leaped to the defense. "Ward Coan used to be one of the nicest chaps on this island. But he changed all over when young Alvin started to cut him out with Maida. Young Alvin didn't play fair in that any more'n he does in anything else he tackles."

The other man looked frightened. "*Ss-s-s-sh!* Dang'rous to hout young Alvin."

"He don't hold no mo'gidge over me!" boasted the landlord. "And I'll say what I want to. He's a liar and a devilish sneak and he's got that aunt goofered and the girl scairt! Ward Coan will be all right again if he gets Maida. And I hope he's back here to stay long enough to do it. And if he manages to put the ever-lasting kibosh onto young Alvin it'll be a blessing for the whole island!"

However, the landlord did not let Coan in on those softer sentiments. Scowl was returned for scowl during the next few days; conversation was restricted to terse remarks that were snapped out with the effect of dogs barking at each other.

Coan was in a grievous state of mind, and he frankly admitted as much to himself as he pondered on how he might tackle the situation.

He did have understanding friends among the young folks on Wass. Through that friendship he was privately informed by several girls that Maida was surely and truly in love with him but had been wrought upon by her aunt and young Alvin until her resistance was almost battered down. She had been hearing only one side of the thing, and, as old Sawt said, "a girl is only a girl."

ONE day old Sawt said something else to Coan. The two had arrived at a truce without any foolish talk in the way of apology except as Sawt vouchsafed, "I like ye, Wardie! Al'ays liked ye. *You* was all right till young Alvin got afoul o' ye! Now if he can be coopered finally and to a finish, you'll be all right once more. Thought any plan up yet?"

"I keep thinking all the time," confessed Coan mournfully. "But I always fetch bang up onto the same reef! Can't see any way but to walk in and kill him. And that wouldn't get me anywhere."

"Only into State prison, sonny. You'd be well settled there, without no more worry how to make a living. But that wouldn't help ye none with the girl."

They were in the back room. Old Sawt was down on his knees fussing with certain materials in a crock; he was "setting another hen," he told Coan.

"If it was all a case o' love with young Alvin mebbe I wouldn't turn a hand to help ye ag'inst him. Meddling in love is turrible resky business for an outsider. But young Alvin is too much in love with making money to have much of any love to spare on a girl. He's got something up his sleeve, Wardie!"

Sawt gave the young man a sly side-squint, and Coan nodded in acknowledgment of Sawt's ability as information-getter.

THE old man patted the side of the crock. "Little drops o' water make the mighty ocean, like the pome says, but they can't make clams open their shells if the clams is set in their notions. These little drops in here can do the business with human clams, though! It's the way I git news when I'm after what I want to know. Coax 'em in here, bolt the door, pass 'em the tin dipper—and Natur' operates! So that's how it has come 'round that Job Seekins has told me all about what young Alvin and that perfesser-style feller from the Main has been doing on that back-pasture lot of the Wrenn place. Job was took along to do the digging and put in the blasts. Then he kivered the gash over ag'in! And he overheard Mister Goggle-specs tell young Alvin as how the slate samples already sent to be examined had almost no mineral, and so that slate was just the checker for telefoam exchange boards and all them other things where 'lectricity has to be handled slick and smooth. Tells young Alvin there aint but



Coan, nearing Maida, lunged back and tugged at the reins. The rotten leather parted, and he fell helplessly into the back of the wagon.

a few places where such slate can be got a-holt of. It's good's a gold-mine, says Four-eyes! Young Alvin is too mean to *buy* it—reckons he'll *marry* it. An' it looks like he's a-going to do that same! Now what be you going to do, Wardie?"

"Damned if I know!" blurted Coan. "I stand about as much show as a smallpox case at getting into the Wrenn house for a talk."

Old Sawt drank off two dipperfuls in quick succession. Then he wiped the back of his hand across his mouth and advised valorously: "Rush the place! Grab her! Elope! She'll be glad of it. Girls like such things."

"Dammit, Sawt, you've gone to work and trigged me, telling me what you have said about that slate. If I give Maida that kind of a grand rush she'll wake up later and figger I'm the same as Alvin Wass, grabbing off a slate quarry with her thrown in! If she is believing all they're saying against me now, it shows she'll believe a lot more later."

"Cuss it, there aint no real gimp in young fellers these days," scoffed Sawt, stirring his brew with the dipper and fetching up from the depths a brimming, slopping potion. He quaffed to the final drop and banged the empty dipper against the crock. "There's the real '*ting*' in this! If you'd be sensible and load up with it you'd skedaddle to the Wrenn house and make that old maid aunt play hoss and you'd gallop away on her with the girl hooked under your arm. Don't ye ever read po'try? You don't think that Lockyvar feller was cold sober, do ye, when he grabbed off his best girl and got praised up forever? No, sir! He was lickered up with good old Scotch." He dipped and proffered it. "Now go ahead and put some git-up-and-git into your gizzard!" he urged.

COAN indignantly pushed away the brimming dipper.

"None o' that stuff for me!"

"Mebbe you think you need Scotch, like young Lockyvar did! Well, if you've got any grit I'll bet ye I can tell ye where to git a-holt o' some—and right handy."

"And none of that, either!"

"You aint got no gumption," squealed the old man. "I've been saving a big thing for you to tackle—and it's right in your line. But I aint going to pass it to you if you don't show some grit."

"I'm not going to make seventeen kinds

of a fool of myself to satisfy your notions of grit!"

"All right! I've got you sized. You aint my kind. Git out o' here!" babbled old Sawt with fretful resentment. "I was ready to let you in on something that would rip the roof off'm your wust enemy —but ye've got to show some grit to make yourself worth my attention."

"But see here, Sawt! If you can really help me, please go ahead and be a good friend."

"Friends aint friends till they take a few rousing good swigs together," insisted the old man, dogged in his well-primed state of mind. "Will you prove you're a real pal?" He slopped the brew on Coan's new suit, trying to push the dipper into his face.

The young man snapped off the stool and stamped out, cursing old Sawt and his devilish hooch.

OUT in the open, it was borne in on Gunner Coan that matters were converging to a climax.

From where he stood he had a full view to seaward. On the skyline was the cutter *Ogunquit,* unmistakably heading toward Wass Harbor. He was not a bit surprised; the Old Man had not inquired regarding the gunner's destination merely to make sociable talk. Coan remembered the significant twist of Captain Tomson's lips when the Old Man had snapped, "That's all—for *now*!" They were coming to hook him back into the service.

Prodded by the sight of the *Ogunquit,* he felt again the same sting of determination that had put him into action that first day on Wass. He resolved to find out for good and all where he stood! And if Wass Island had no more to offer—then back to the old job! He had a hankering to blow up something. It would be satisfying to get back in the magazine among the high explosives!

First of all, there was the problem of Maida Wrenn. He saw no sense in footing it up to the mansion once more, trying to get to her past the guard of the spinster aunt, through the gantlet of goggling city boarders.

Coan planned quickly because time was an essential element; the smoke from the cutter's buff stack indicated that she was making speed. Hastily he decided on a plan to get Maida away by herself where he could have a heart-to-heart talk.

"Squealing Jote" Samson was loafing in a splint-bottom chair outside his livery-stable down the street.

"Hey, there, Jote!" shouted Coan. "I want a hitch—nice, steady horse."

"Wa-a-all, ye see—" started Squealing Jote in his highest piccolo tones.

Coan shut him off with a yell. "Have that hitch ready in half an hour! Else I'll fix both eyes so you *can't* see!"

Exasperation was keyed high in Coan at that moment. He had glanced at his garments in the sunlight. Sawt's purplish brew had left ugly stains on the snappy gray tweed; there was also a betraying odor that the delicate nostrils of a girl would surely detect—and already Coan had been too well advertised by his foes as a "rummy."

"Razor Reub" was idle, leaning against his barber pole. Coan hurried across the street to him.

"I want a shave and a trim—and do you know how to take spots like that off'm clothes?"

"What done it?" lazily queried Reub, peering.

"None o' your damn' business! Answer my own question."

"Huh! Don't ever try to handle your temper, do you? Well, I can smell what it is—and I've took out them kind o' spots in the past. But you'll have to go to a doc to have such spots took out o' your stummick," maundered the barber. "Better shy away from these Wass Island hens, Ward!"

"You shut up and get your cleaning stuff ready," raged Coan. "I'll be right back."

He started for Wass' store on the run. He had come to a decision to play all his cards face up.

THE Wass store had the public telephone, just as it had cornered everything else on the island to turn in profit.

Coan entered the booth under the gaze of young Alvin, left the door open and called the Wrenn mansion. He disguised his voice and asked boldly for Maida.

"This is Ward speaking," he reported after his interval of waiting. "In the course of half an hour I'm going to drive up to your house, Maida. To save all kinds of trouble I'm going to ask you to be waiting at your gate, ready to hop in and take a little ride with me. Hold on! I know all about it; I don't mean to

warn or to threaten, dear! But"—into his tone he put deep meaning—"*you be at your gate*—waiting!" He ruthlessly clicked back the transmitter.

Then he marched to the counter, behind which Alvin Wass was intrenched, and banged down a coin.

"Hope you heard all I said, Wass! Any remarks?"

Wass shook his head.

"The first day I was here I gave you fair warning. That's the way I'm still playing the thing. I'll be back later for the final showdown!"

Coan hurried away to the barber's and flung himself out of Wass' sight.

The latter took advantage of this eclipse of the foe and scurried across the street to the livery-stable. "I've been expecting he'd get around to wanting a hitch, Jote. I've told you so. You're all prepared, 'cording to our plans, aint you?"

"I sure be, Mister Young Alvin," he was assured with the servile docility involved with a blanket mortgage on stable and horses.

"Then go to it in a hurry."

Jote closed and padlocked the door of the carriage repository where there were three fairly decent buggies.

Before young Alvin was back in the store, the stable-man was leading into the gloom of the basement two of his three horses.

On his return to the stall floor he brought a bucket containing an odorous mash. He dumped it into the feed box of a stall where the third horse leaned against the boarding and leered evilly. "Go on, Irontail Ike, and gollolop down another hatching from your own private hen," invited Jote cheerfully. "You're now going to find out why I've been keeping you pie-eyed for the last week. You brace up and do your stuff or else the cats in this town will think their Santa Claus has landed on Wass to give 'em a barbecue."

The horse lunged forward and nuzzled gustfully into the mash.

"I aint overtraining him, I hope," muttered Jote. "But a last, final, good bracer ought to fetch him up out o' that kind o' logy condition he's in now."

Special Spy Trufant had been in the store, always close on young Alvin's heels in those days, and had heard what Coan had said over the telephone.

"For the biggest man on the island you're letting that cockadoodler git away with altogether too much, young Alvin. Mebbe you don't want to touch your own hands to him, but you ought to give orders now to have him licked to a standstill. Only say the word!"

"If you open your mouth and start any mob stuff I'll sue you for that grocery bill," threatened Wass with ire. "I'm running this from now on and I'm using brains instead o' fists. Understand?"

"Oh, I know you've got plenty o' brains," soothed Trufant.

"No man who has been made redick'-lous here has ever been able to stick it out on Wass, and you know it, Trufant. Even a general snicker will make 'em hole in! But the Big Laugh! The feller who gits it here might as well scoot off'm Wass and stay off if he ever wants any peace of mind. And that cussed Coan is going to get that Big Laugh almighty sudden or I'm missing my guess." He rapped his knuckles on his shiny bald head. "They're in there, Trufant! Always alive and kicking! Ready to git busy when called on!"

"Whatever they be that's inside his head, they'd better stay there. They couldn't pick up no kind of a living on the outside of that knob o' his!" Trufant muttered as soon as young Alvin's back was turned.

"Better go out and post yourself in a good place to see all," advised Wass from his distance. "The big show is about ready to start. Pass the word all sly, up and down the street."

AT the end of a brief session, Customer Coan departed from the barber-shop. He came out on the run. Razor Reub chased at the patron's heels brandishing a hand with a lump of alum pinched between thumb and forefinger.

"It warn't my fault that your chin got nicked," the barber shouted for all to hear. "You didn't have no business waggling that chin all the time, telling me to hurry. Hold up and wait, I tell ye! I don't perpose to be advertised by a man running up and down on Wass Island with a gore o' blood all over his chin."

At the door of the livery stable Coan turned in his wrath and whirled the pursuer around and dealt him a kick or two, starting him back toward his shop. "You damnation blacksmith, all you've done is set that stain for keeps into my new suit

and mallyhack my face! If I had a little time to spare right now I'd grab onto one o' them potato-peelers you call razors and I'd scalp you." Coan ran into the stable.

"He's fuller'n a tick! He's drunker'n a bear!" proclaimed the antagonized Reub to the assembling populace, when he was within reaching distance of the sanctuary of his shop. "He has sopped up so much hen-hatching that it's spilling out through his skin onto his clothes. Jote Samson is a blasted fool to let that whoopereenus have a hitch. There's going to be a hell of a hoorah when he gits onto the ro'd!"

That proclamation settled the convictions of the bystanders; in the case of Ward Coan they were of no disposition to differentiate between rage and rum.

ON his part Coan allowed fury full swing. All the devilish items of general animosity were added into a single total of ugly combativeness; he was letting himself go—to the full tether of temper.

He found the stableman having some kind of a terrific struggle with the horse on which Samson was putting the harness. Coan deluged Squealing Jote with profanity because the hitch was not ready. Jote suspended his labors; he was trying to get the crupper under the animal's tail, dodging shuttling heels.

"Lend a hand to help me," urged Samson. "Grab him by the headstall. Cuff his old chops. Make him take his 'tention off'm his hind legs."

When Coan made a pass as directed, the horse opened his mouth and made a vicious snap at the threatening hand. At the same time Coan got a whiff of equine breath and was momentarily set to wondering where he had sniffed that peculiar odor before. He remembered a moment later when he had managed to secure a firm clutch on the headstall; old Sawt's breath always bore that sort of pervasive scent. When Coan vigorously twisted the animal's neck, the horse sat down on his haunches.

"Make him h'ist up," squealed Jote. "I've got to git that crupper under his tail."

For a few moments Coan took no interest in the struggle with the hind end; he was critically sizing up the end which he was controlling. He stared into the watery, leering eyes, he scrutinized the slobbering, pendulous lower lip. Those symptoms, along with the odorous breath, were convincing. Then he caught a guilty side-glance from Jote.

"You infernal squealing rat, this horse is drunker'n four barrels o' rum!"

" 'T'aint no sech thing! I've only give' him a dose to ca'm his heaves!"

"I wont have him. You can't shove him off onto me."

"He's all you'll git off'm me today. My other two hosses is let out to drummers who've driv' over to the other village. Take this hoss or hoof it!"

By this time Maida would be waiting! The lover was sure she had been properly impressed by his vague warning. To be more certain, he left the horse sitting and ran to the stable doorway. Far up the road, a little way from the Wrenn house on the high hill, he glimpsed a figure in white moving slowly—undoubtedly the girl sauntering away from the espionage of the aunt..

Coan rushed back to the horse and gave him a forward yank that would have broken an anchor out of muddy holding ground.

Taking advantage of the animal's diverted attention, Jote slipped the crupper into place and buckled the strap. Then he leaped and lifted the thills of a vehicle. "Back him in whilst his mind is took up!"

"Not by a damsite—not into that!" raved the patron.

It was a single-seat, open delivery wagon carrying a mammoth, parti-colored umbrella which was labeled in huge letters: "DODD'S PICKLED HERRINGS."

"This or nothing," stated Jote. "My top buggies is gone for the day."

Plainly, as Coan viewed it, it was a situation without an alternative.

In the silence, while he took thought, he heard the shrill piping of a boatswain's whistle. The *Ogunquit* had arrived in the harbor. And he was still without his ammunition for the impending duel with the Old Man!

He buckled his side of the harness, hooked in the tugs and leaped into the seat under the umbrella.

Jote tossed the reins to Coan. The horse was "weaving" and kicking.

"This is that nice, quiet horse I ordered, hey?" rasped the customer.

"I tried to tell ye, but ye wouldn't listen!" Then Jote swapped kicks with the horse; the brute reared and pranced out of the stable on his hind legs.

In the road he took the bit in his teeth and hooked over one rein a tail which gave significant meaning to the name which Jote bestowed for private use.

With sailor agility, in spite of the speed the horse was making, Coan bent over the dasher and tried to lift the tail off the rein.

"If he roots up that p'tickler pa'snip



Coan gained the deck, and laid about him fiercely. A stunning thwack stiffened out the captain; another swing of fist dropped the other man.

he's a good one!" Jote confided to himself, peering under his palm. "Guess Irontail Ike is cal'lating on doing his stuff, all right!"

COAN had only a sailor's poor knack with a horse. He was unable to control the brute when the outfit neared the solitary figure in white. He yelled incoherent explanations to Maida when the horse galloped past; he kept yelling from the distance beyond her.

The girl had long been the target of those persistent tongues, nagging away everlastingly at the character of Ward Coan. She truly wanted to believe the best about him—but the tongues dealt only with the worst. Now it seemed—

And then from the porch of the Wrenn house one of the lounging city men yelped a bit of humor which started a big laugh among his fellow boarders. The advertising legend made a complete circle of the umbrella top. Viewed from the porch, as Coan went on his wild way, the one word *"PICKLED"* was disclosed. The city man's remark was concerned with that word.

Maida set her teeth and walked on, away from the house, even though her aunt came out onto the porch and called commands.

Sailor Coan's tiller was not wholly jammed; one rein was free and he used it in steering the horse onto a side road. This road led around in a wide circle toward the village, following the shore of the dammed-in reach which made a pond for the old tide-mill; the dam was a dirt embankment, with a short bridge over the gateway, and the road on which Coan was circling in his unwilling flight led into the causeway along the crest of the embankment.

The horse readily responded to the helm in taking the circle road; he was heading toward the stable.

But when he was across the dam and had arrived once more in the hamlet, he failed to make port in his stall. Jote prevented it by running out of the stable door and waving a blanket.

The horse shied away, swished the wagon around on two wheels and took again to the highway which led past the Wrenn house.

Coan, nearing Maida on this second trip, managed to pry up the iron tail, but when he lunged back into the seat and tugged on the reins, the rotten leather in both of them parted and he fell over the seat into the back of the wagon and tore past the girl, his legs waving helplessly in the air.

Again the horse took the side-road of his own accord, galloping down the descent toward the dam, an uncontrollable runaway.

By this time there was a full gallery on the sides of the village street.

"You can't expect nothing else from Ward Coan," proclaimed the barber Reub. "He come into my shop smelling to the skies and stewed to the gills."

"Your jedgment is nicked wusser'n your razors be, you cussnation old liar," yelled Sawt Barter from the opposite side of the street. He was now the vociferous and vigorous defender. It was through his own fault, the old man realized, that Coan was in a way to be everlastingly ticketed as a no-good on Wass. In Sawt surged the full tide of repentance and resolution. And just then he saw young Alvin toss a high sign to Jote Samson, flapping a skinny hand.

Jote snapped out the blanket and stood ready for a second job of fend-off.

Men were guffawing; the Big Laugh was in full swing!

Young Alvin had passed the word about Coan's telephoned command to Maida Wrenn to be out and waiting. He pitched the key of the laughter with his own cackle.

"They say a third time never fails," squawked a satirist. "Better toss Coan a net and let him try to beam-trawl her when he goes past her next time."

"The boy is done for in this haw-haw's nest 'less the wind is made to shift," lamented old Sawt under his odorous breath. He rushed across the street to Jote. "You let that hoss swing into the stable!"

"He has hired a hitch for a good drive and I'll see to it that he gits his money's wuth," declared the liveryman doggedly.

There was no time for argument with this henchman of young Alvin. Old Sawt swung on Jote Samson with a solid *thunk* under the ear, yanked away the blanket and ran down the middle of the road toward the dam.

He met the runaway on the short bridge.

An outspread blanket always affects a frightened horse as a solid wall might do. Coan's steed not only shied, but he sat back on his haunches and slid.

Sawt flung the enveloping blanket over the horse's head and hugged the thin neck. There was a struggle of floundering horse and determined man; during the melee Coan leaped out onto the animal's back.

The blindfolded beast rolled and smashed through the frail railing of the old bridge. Both men went with him. The forward wheels of the wagon hooked against a fence post; the rotten tugs broke and the vehicle was left on the bridge.

IT was the middle of ebb tide. The penned waters of the pond were pouring through the sluiceway and the horse and the men clinging to him were swept down the rush of waters and out into the harbor.

"I can't swim, Wardie," gasped Sawt. "We'd best hang onto this critter."

The horse, though hoodwinked by the soggy blanket, was swimming sturdily.

Sawt spewed out water and was having trouble with speech, but he had something important to say in that crisis, and he said it.

"Sonny, it's an awful big laugh they're giving you ashore—but it's the last laugh that counts. And that laugh is going to be yours."

"It is, is it?" rasped the victim, towed along on the other side of the horse. "You'd better have that sense of humor o' yours pulled! It's affecting your mind!"

Sawt banged his fist against the side of the horse's head. "Cuff his old chops on your side, Wardie! Keep him steering to'ards young Alvin's packet. 'Cause listen!"

He spat out more water and declared: "I'm knowing to it as how young Alvin is shipping rum to Boston in them canned-fish cases. Fast boats come in o' nights and deliver licker up through the trap door of his cannery. And here's the chance, with that cutter in here now, to knock the props out from under Alvin Wass. Bub, it'll be one hell of a bump!"

"Why in the blue blazes haven't you told me this before now?" growled Coan.

"Ye wasn't showing no grit to make ye wuth my 'tention," squealed Sawt, giving the veering horse another slap. "But now we're two of a kind, in the same boat, as

ye might say, and I'm proving myself a friend. Bang your side o' the critter's head, Wardie. He's gitting off'm the course."

In a few minutes more the swimming horse brought his twin tow under the counter of the packet.

"Guess you'll have to lick the cap'n and his man singlehanded, Wardie," wheezed old Sawt. "I'm 'bout tuckered!"

"I'm ugly enough to lick a battleship crew," growled Coan.

The little two-master, with most of her cargo aboard, showed only a low freeboard at the waist.

Coan loosed his hold on the harness and leaped for the rail, though the master and his man, astonished by this new method of boarding, poked boat-hooks at him. But he was nimble and quick—and fired with berserker rage. He gained the deck, yanked the slippery staff of a boat-hook out of the master's hands and laid about fiercely. A stunning thwack stiffened out the captain; another swing of fist under ear dropped the other man across the body of the master.

Then Coan reached down the boat-hook to Sawt, who was clinging to the main chain plates, and hoisted his friend aboard. The horse, shaking off the blanket, was heading for shore.

"Grab the end of that halyard and tie 'em up, Sawt!" commanded Coan. "Make a bundle of the two of 'em before they come to!"

The packet was moored to a buoy. Coan ran forward and cast off. When he hurtled past Sawt, on the way back aft, the old man was tightening bights around the prostrate men, bracing his foot against them to get a purchase.

Just forward of the lazaret bulkhead Coan found the packet's gasoline "kicker" —the auxiliary engine for service when the wind failed. He flipped the fly wheel over with the starter-bar; he relished the staccato barkings of the unmuffled exhaust; the noise was like a prolonged salute to victory.

He had been taking Sawt's word as to cargo contents. By the time Coan was back on deck, at the wheel, the old man was proving his reliability as an information bureau. He emerged from the main hatch, boosting in front of him a wooden case. After a lusty yawp to call Coan's attention, Sawt banged off the case's cover with a marlinspike, flung onto the deck a few tins which masked the case's real contents, and then brandished a bottle aloft. "And I aint taking the say-so o' labels, Wardie!" Sawt whacked off the neck of the bottle with the spike and poured copiously into his mouth, tipping back his head and getting a bath as well as a royal drink. "It's the clear quill, sonny!" the tester managed to report between gulps; "and plenty more where this come from!"

Coan threw over the tiller and ran his detonating capture hard aboard the *Ogunquit,* circling the anchored cutter. To Lieutenant Brady, leaning from the end of the bridge, he yelled, "Respectful compliments to Captain Tomson, sir! I've done that job he asked me to do! I'm docking her!"

Coan knew well enough what the executive officer's shouts and gestures signified. But the gunner kept on his way, pointing to his ears and overside to the noisy exhaust, shaking his head, making believe he could not understand the order to come alongside.

Coan's temper was flaming again to white heat. He was determined to cap triumph with a real, soul-satisfying bang. He was going to *show* Wass Island this time—give the wagging tongues real fodder!

He headed the packet straight for the mouth of young Alvin's dock. There was "a bone in her teeth" under the impulse of the fifty-horsepower kicker.

The assembled citizens began to shout warning and to herd back.

ON board, Coan was having it all his own way. The trussed-up men were struggling vainly against their bonds. Old Sawt was wholly occupied. He was boosting more cases up on deck. He burst them open by hurling them against the bulwarks. He picked up broken bottles and tossed what remained of the contents into his gaping mouth. He was too busy to pay any attention to the course the packet was taking.

It was a terrific smash when it occurred! The bow of the packet was crushed against the retaining wall like a rotten pumpkin. Down came the masts in a tangle of rigging.

Out of the welter, hopping nimbly over stays and spars, Coan leaped upon the stringpiece of the dock's head and strode through the press of the people. They made way for him. He said nothing;

his bodeful countenance served better than speech.

Before he reached Maida, who was hurrying down the hill to learn what it was all about, he turned to look behind and beheld the *Ogunquit's* motor-launch frothing into the dock, the Old Man in the stern-sheets.

Therefore, circumstances being as they were, he was able to meet the girl with a disarming smile of perfect contentment.

"Maida, dear, I want you to take a little walk with me—over to your back-pasture. I want you to see something there—and I'll tell you about it."

"But you ought to put on dry clothes, Ward!" she protested.

"I came back to Wass to ask you to marry me, Maida. And I bought this suit to wear for the occasion. By gracious, I'm going to stick to my plans!"

"But you'll catch cold."

"Not if you keep looking at me like you are doing now," declared the lover gallantly. "I don't need any more sunshine, right now!"

They walked hand in hand over the brow of the hill and nobody in the village paid any attention to this reunion. Right at that moment all the interest of the populace was centered in seeing young Alvin Wass get his everlasting come-uppance. Captain Tomson of the coast-guard cutter was attending to the matter in person.

IN the twilight, with Maida Wrenn as passenger, Gunner Coan rowed to the *Ogunquit* and the two were received aft with remarkable cordiality by the Old Man himself.

And after much talk one way and another, extremely agreeable in tenor and purport, Captain Tomson laid his hand caressingly on Gunner Coan's shoulder and pleaded with Maida to allow such an A-One and able chap to remain in the service. "He's our best man in handling high explosives, Miss Wrenn," he urged. "Uncle Sam needs him!"

"Uncle Sam has had him long enough. Now *I* need him! I've found a way to be forever rid of hungry rusticators and a hot cookstove. My fortune is to be blasted out of the ground and"—she rose and went to Gunner Coan and laid her palm gently on the shoulder that the Captain was not monopolizing—"I'm here and now claiming my blasting boss!"

The Pariah

By BERTRAM ATKEY

A thrilling adventure of the extraordinary Merlin O'Moore and his strange friends—by the author of "The Easy Street Experts."

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

THEY were just concluding a little friendly game of poker in the sitting-room which Henri, head waiter of the Medieval Hall at the Astoritz, shared with a few others of the more important functionaries of the huge hotel; and Fin MacBatt, the valet and personal attendant of Mr. Merlin O'Moore, was there.

He was, indeed, very much to the fore, being desperately engaged in promoting a very tolerable jackpot which he sincerely believed he, with the powerful aid of four queens, would very shortly be shoveling into his pocket. It was passing many a moon since Mr. MacBatt had held four queens, or four of any kind, and very naturally he wanted to make the most of it. Only his friend Henri remained in the betting, and the couple had raised each other the limit—half a crown, five times. Henri was looking nervous, but Mr. MacBatt (save for a poniard-like glitter in his eyes, his clenched teeth, and a slight unconscious twitching of his ears) gave no sign that he expected momentarily to cannibalize that jackpot.

It was Henri's bet, but after a swift uncertain glance at the grim face of MacBatt, Henri's nerve failed him. Instead of raising the bet, he added the requisite chips to the pot and "saw" Mr. MacBatt.

"All right, Honroy," said the valet. "Here you are—four little queens!" He spread the cards out on the table and reached for the jackpot. But—!

"Halte-là!" said Honroy, with something like a sob of relief. *"Voilà,* my old!



"I beg you will forgive the curiosity which impelled me to stare at your motor-bicycle, sir," said the Fitz-Percy suavely. "I have never had an opportunity to examine one closely."

T'ree kings and joker! Four kings, huh?" And he surrounded the jackpot lovingly.

"Pretty hot, that!" said MacBatt with a pale glare and an iron smile. "Your money, Honroy! Gimme a drink. And then we'd better be moving. I've got to get Merlin ready for dinner, and you've got to get dinner ready for Merlin."

"Perfectly, my old!" said Honroy, and clinked glasses with the cleaned-out MacBatt. . . . .

Mr. O'Moore was giving a little dinner to a few friends that evening in the Medieval Hall, the party comprising Miss Blackberry Brown, the famous and attractive white-black comédienne who was Merlin's best friend; Mr. Fitz-Percy, the ancient Deadhead, protégé of Mr. O'Moore, who claimed to be the pretty Blackberry's "guardian" (though upon what abstruse and complicated grounds he claimed that privilege no man knew); Miss Brown's recently married friend—once Miss Clover Sweeting, but now Mrs. Jack Mallandan—and Clover's husband.

These were the guests, and the dinner was by way of celebrating the successful conclusion of the couple's first month of married life. That, at least, was the ostensible reason, but, as Miss Brown had more than once vaguely hinted, there might be more behind the celebration than met the eye.

"Well, Double B," Merlin had suggested, guessing that the delightful Blackberry had left something unsaid, when she first hinted that there might be developments, "if there is anything I can do for you or your little friend—or her husband—let me know."

"*Dear* Merlin!" said Miss Brown. "I know you will. . . . . We shall see." And she proceeded to turn the subject by asking Molossus, the deadly-looking *dogue de Bordeaux* who was Mr. O'Moore's inseparable companion, to have a chocolate—which Molo, with the slightly sheepish smile of a jollied man-eater, accepted.

SOMEWHAT to Merlin O'Moore's surprise, his dinner was not entirely a success. There seemed to be a shadow upon things. Exactly what was wrong he could not trace. Because he delighted to please Miss Blackberry Brown, he exerted himself to the utmost to amuse her friend Clover—a little, fair, golden-haired lady, with very perfect and daintily chiseled features. But Clover seemed subdued, and so did her practically brand-new husband.

Even the Fitz-Percy, expanding over a dinner that touched his heart, cooing wit-

ticisms, telling quaint little anecdotes, emitting brilliant whimsicalities, did not succeed in dispelling the shadow.

"Clover has one of her quiet moods," said Miss Brown playfully, but Clover denied it. Whether his wife was in a quiet mood or not, certainly Mr. Jack Mallandan was in a thirsty mood. He inflicted very heavy punishment upon Merlin's incomparable wines, but it added to the gayety of the evening not at all.

AT last Miss Brown could not endure the restraint any longer.

"Br-rr!" she went. "It's like flirting with a vegetarian in the porch of an unlighted and empty church on a wet November evening! Merlin, you are thinking that my little Clover-girl is a cold and glum and gloomy girl—and that her husband-man is a dullard-person! And they're not. They're awfully lively folk, really, but they're worried. The poor things are so worried that they can't forget their troubles even for just dinner-time. So please be kind, Merlin, and let us have coffee upstairs, and Clover and Jack will tell you all about it. *Really*, you know, that's why I wanted you to meet them. There's something very awkward for them going on—and I know that you and I and Mr. Fitz-Percy and Molossus and that extraordinary MacBatt can put it right—"

"Why, my dear girl—of course!"

"There is nothing in all this wonderful world, dear ladies, that such a combination cannot put right," said the silvery-haired old Deadhead in his deepest, most resonant voice.

They started to rise; at that moment, conclusive proof arrived that decidedly there was something connected with the Mallandans which needed putting right. For through the open top of the deep windows under which the party had sat, came an object which looked like a very small half-inflated football. It dropped soggily upon the table, upsetting some wine-glasses.

Clover Mallandan paled, giving a startled little cry, staring and clutching at Merlin's arm. Mr. Mallandan swore briefly in a disconcerted voice.

Henri, hovering near, threw up his hands in horror at this desecration of his paradise, the Medieval Hall, and sent an underling at once to have men issue forth and capture the miscreant.

Merlin and the Deadhead were leaning over examining the object. The Fitz-Percy, who was nearest, picked it up. It *was* a half-inflated football—child's size. Tied to it was a label on which was printed in roughly formed letters:

> *If this were a bomb, wouldn't it be awkward for little Clover and her dear Jack, not to mention all their nice new friends!*
> *The Pariah.*

It was Mallandan who read it—with a queer savage note in his voice; and Blackberry Brown caught Clover as she swayed, half-fainting, against the table.

"Now you see," said the girl weakly, "why we were so glum! They keep on coming!"

Then in the momentary silence which fell upon the uneasily staring people, a clean, crisp smack was heard. It came from under the window outside, and was followed by a voice—the voice of none other than Mr. Fin MacBatt.

"Take that, you blackguard! What d'ye mean by throwing things into—*huh!*"

Mr. MacBatt's lecture broke off abruptly, punctuated, as it were, with a dull, wooden sound, as of a truncheon against a head—both thick. Followed a scuffling patter of feet, and a short silence, swiftly broken by the rushing sound of reinforcements hurrying out of the hotel.

But all that the reinforcements discovered was Mr. MacBatt, semi-conscious, sitting on the pavement, swearing feebly like a tired parrot, with a passer-by trying rather confusedly to unbutton his collar, in order, presumably, to give him more air. Of the thrower of the football that might have been a bomb, there was no sign.

Leaving Merlin O'Moore to accompany his guests up to his suite, the Fitz-Percy promptly took charge of the "bonneted" MacBatt, whom very shortly he succeeded in leading to where "a cognac or so awaits us, my good MacBatt!"

THE following hour was devoted mainly to explanations—on the whole, lucid. Long before Merlin O'Moore called upon MacBatt for some account of his participation in the flurry of that evening, he and his friend the Deadhead perceived that the Mallandans' lack of high spirits was not at all unnatural.

For they were haunted—in effect. Not "ha'nted of ghosts," but by something which, although exceedingly elusive, was by no means as intangible as a ghost. Like

Blackberry Brown, Miss Clover Sweeting, in the days not long past, when she was a musical comedy favorite, had possessed many admirers, known and unknown. Of all these none had been more enthusiastic than a gentleman who never appeared in person to afflict her, but whose output of love-letters seemed to be unlimited. He had written by practically every post, frequently telegraphed, and quite often telephoned. But he had never called. He signed himself invariably "the Pariah." Why he was a pariah did not appear. . . . .

This man had never wearied of informing Miss Sweeting that he adored her so much that he could not dream of marrying her. (Nothing was ever said about his chance of doing so—which in any case was so slender as to be nonexistent.) "The Pariah" had explained dozens of times that he regarded Clover as the Perfect Woman, and that she was enshrined in his heart and permanently fixed before his mental gaze, as an Object of Adoration. He requested her to refrain from marriage until she met the Perfect Man—which, added the Pariah, would never happen.

Unfortunately Miss Clover had already met the Perfect Man—according to her—namely, Mr. Jack Mallandan, and some two months after the Pariah had begun to pour out his ink in her praise, she had married Mr. Mallandan—thus showing her good taste, for Mallandan was good to look upon, a gentleman, not unreasonably selfish, extraordinarily rich, and he worshiped the charming Miss Sweeting almost idolatrously. She showed him some of the weirder of the Pariah's letters, and with a passing careless comment on the "cold-drawn cheek of the lout," Jack Mallandan had forgotten him. Clover had destroyed the correspondence and forgotten the writer also.

But he had recalled himself very abruptly to their minds on the second morning after their arrival at Mr. Mallandan's ancestral home. They were breakfasting by an open window in the sunshine when on the lawn just outside had fallen a half-inflated child's football, bearing one of those labels which had now become very familiar to them.


Mallandan read the label—a queer, savage note in his voice.

It was a message from the Pariah, who was frightfully annoyed about Clover's marriage. It had destroyed an Ideal, he said, and thereafter he purposed punishing them both. He wound up by pointing out to them how excessively awkward it would have been for them had the football been a bomb—which was obvious. He added that some day it *would* be the genuine article. Meantime he intended to keep them well supplied with "warnings."

MALLANDAN, a rather silent, bull-doggy young man who had spent his youth in the Navy, which he had only left on the death of his father, in order properly to administer his rather unwieldily large inheritance, was completely without fear on his own behalf, though naturally

enough any unseen danger to his wife would send him into a well-concealed frenzy of anxiety, and he had taken up this matter of the Pariah eagerly.

"The fellow sounds like a maniac, and he probably is one," said Jack. "I am afraid that leather ball might change for the worse some day. Y'see, he hangs about—unseen. He's elusive; he's here today, there tomorrow. Always throws his infernal label when we're in an impossible place. Like tonight, for instance. I've had Longlands—our place—swarming with spies, detectives and things. No good. I've lain out for him at nights. No good. Tried bloodhounds. No good. Everything—haven't I, dear? But he's—like an eel. I've never seen him. No idea what he's like. It's worrying Clover. Me too. To tell the truth, I'm not an idea-merchant outside my own line, and when Miss Brown told Clover of some of your queer moonlight jaunts, we decided that you could help us—you and Mr. Fitz-Percy—"

"And, of course, Blackberry!" chimed in Clover, who was brightening up a little.

"And Molossus," said Merlin.

"And MacBatt—decidedly," added the Fitz-Percy.

But Jack Mallandan was a plain man, and wished no misunderstanding.

"Let's get things clear, don't you think?" he said, very pleasantly but decisively. "I—we—shall be very grateful for an idea how to catch the Pariah person; but when he's caught, he mine."

"Oh, that is quite understood," said Merlin readily, who could see how Mr. Mallandan felt about it.

"Naturally!" boomed the Fitz-Percy. "That goes without saying—yes, indeed." And he assisted himself to another green chartreuse with his accustomed dexterity and grace.

"Well, since MacBatt has been the only one to see him, we may as well have him in," said Merlin. "Ring the bell, Molo!"

The fighting dog pressed his fearsome head on the bell-push and the valet entered, his eyes glittering with a steely glitter inspired by baffled fury, several swift cognacs and a desperate hunger for instant revenge upon the person who had felled him.

"Ah, Fin, there you are!" said Merlin. "How is the head?"

MacBatt favored them with a tense, rather murderous grin.

"It rings like a bell, thank you, sir," he said politely, but with a vibration in his voice that made Molossus look interested. "The blackguard had a club up his sleeve—a genuine cocobolo, sir!"

"Did you see the man, Fin? Could you describe him?"

"Describe him, sir?" responded the valet with a bitter smile. "I've photographed him on my mind for life! He was passing as a negro, sir—dark tint, a sort of pale black, if you understand, sir. But the trouble is, his color comes off." He extended his big right hand, palm downward, exhibiting his knuckles.

They were smeared with a dark smear, as of burnt cork.

"I've got his general build and the shape of his face in my mind, safe enough, sir. But he's not a genuine darky, and I suppose it was a sort of disguise, sir."

Merlin and Company readily agreed, and having carefully cross-examined MacBatt as to the more salient points of the mysterious man with the imitation "livery of the sun," they dismissed him, and drew together, as it were, seriously to map out and arrange a plan of campaign.

TWO days later the Mallandans' delightful old Elizabethan home was transformed into what was not so much a home as a mousetrap, though few would have suspected it.

They were all there—the Mallandans, Miss Brown, and Merlin; the Fitz-Percy, Molossus and MacBatt—*all* there.

The servants at Longlands privately were a little puzzled by the queer mannerisms of some of the party. There was Mr. MacBatt, that queer valet of Mr. Merlin O'Moore, for instance. Why was he so fond of strolling mysteriously about the grounds of the place? Why was his favorite walking-stick so much like an Indian club—though somewhat heavier, on account of the lead with which it was loaded? Why was that dear old gentleman Mr. Fitz-Percy so extremely interested in that motor-bicycle track which had mysteriously appeared near the gates of the carriage drive on the evening after the house-party arrived, and why did he try unsuccessfully—as the lodge-keeper averred—to follow it up along the main road? It was all very puzzling—to the servants.

The Pariah gave no sign during the first two days of the stay of Merlin and Company at Longlands. Probably he was re-



"We will go further into the matter, Molossus," mused the Deadhead. He proceeded to go further into it—via a side window carelessly left unlatched.

cuperating from the effects of the jolt administered to him by MacBatt. Certainly that was the valet's opinion. And the joint commanders of the mousetrap—namely, Messrs. O'Moore and Mallandan—appeared to share it and to be agreed that for a little a waiting game was the best policy.

Not so, however, the Deadhead. Very rarely did that astute old student of the times, as he occasionally described himself, differ from his patron; but apparently he did so now—tactfully, of course. It seemed that he had discovered what might prove to be a clue.

HE explained this to Messrs. O'Moore and Mallandan in the billiard-room on the evening of their third day there.

"I beg of you, dear lads, leave to follow up a little notion of my own. . . . . A straw, laddies, shows sometimes which way the wind blows—but there are also occasions when it breaks the camel's back. I think, dear boys, that I have found a straw—it remains for me to test it." He paused for a moment to test, also, the whisky and soda which he held. He was always a very fine tester.

"How say you, then, Merlin mine? What are *your* views, Jack, my boy? Have I leave to plow my solitary furrow?" the old man asked.

The laddies accorded it.

"Good—very good!" said the Deadhead. "I shall strive to merit your trust."

His striving took him abroad in company with the *dogue* (by permission of Merlin) on the following morning, and since his straw ultimately proved to have considerable bearing on the matter, it may be as well to follow him. Certainly his clue was of the slenderest—being merely that he had gleaned by sheer chance, when gossiping at the village inn (for his own purposes), the news that a Mr. Bellamy Bethune, said to be an artist who lived near the village, had brought back from a short trip to town, a few days before, a pair of singularly perfect black eyes. There was nothing very remarkable in this—a pair of black eyes is a commodity which many men acquire at some period or other of their lives if they ask for it long and persistently enough, but the experienced Fitz-Percy (struck by the facts that Bethune had acquired his black eyes in town at about the same time as MacBatt had undoubtedly presented some one with a pair, and further, that Mr. Bethune lived fairly near the attractive Mrs. Mallandan, as one might expect her jealous adorer to do) had experienced a certain curiosity to discover whether the motorcycle which Bethune was said to possess wore the same kind of tires as those which had left their

imprint at the entrance to the Mallandan carriage drive.

"Personally, Molossus, my young friend, I do not expect to find that the tires match. It would be altogether too fortunate, would it not? But tactful and intelligent inquiry can lose us nothing and may gain for us a great deal," said the ancient as he and Molossus strolled toward the abode of Bellamy Bethune.

Fortune—as usual—favored him; for when about two miles from Longlands, he approached the Bethune bungalow—a small, untidy-looking place, with a last-year's garden—he saw that a motorcycle was standing outside, its back end raised upon two spidery legs, so that it looked as if it were going to lash out like a vicious horse at any moment. The Fitz-Percy needed only a glance at the tires to see that their non-slip rubber pattern matched the imprint on the carriage drive perfectly.

Possibly Mr. Bethune had been doing a little scouting near Longlands recently.

"Good, Molossus—excellent," said the Deadhead. "We will now endeavor to get a glimpse of Mr. Bethune himself."

SOON this was achieved; for even as he looked up the Fitz-Percy saw coming down the path a man who possessed a pair of eyes that were not merely black but also yellow, blue, green and bloodshot. Obviously Mr. Bellamy Bethune—a big but singularly plain person, with a face like that of a soured cab-horse.

The Fitz-Percy raised his hat and bowed with his stately Piccadilly grace.

"I beg that you will forgive the curiosity which impelled me to stare at your motor-bicycle, sir," he said suavely. "I belong, I fear, to an era prior to the advent of these amazing inventions, and I have never had an opportunity to examine one closely."

"Well, now you have, and much good may it do you. It's a damned poor grid, anyway!" responded Mr. Bethune very ungraciously, and kicked the machine sharply in the ribs, causing it to burst into a terrifying roar. Then he mounted it and rode away.

The Deadhead, perfectly unruffled, watched him disappear.

"'Tis but a churlish fellow, I fear, Molossus," he said musingly. "Let us examine his lair. Perhaps his wife—if he has one—or his housekeeper may prove more garrulous, to a—a what, little dog? Let us reflect. What would *Mr. Sherlock Holmes* claim to be to the wife or housekeeper of an artist concerning whom he desires to glean information? A buyer of pictures? Obviously. Very good—a buyer of pictures."

And the Fitz-Percy, who had probably never bought a picture of any kind in his life, except an occasional postage stamp, proceeded leisurely up to the bungalow. Ten minutes of fruitless knocking revealed to him the extremely gratifying knowledge that the house was empty.

"It would seem, Molossus mine, that like many another artist, the good Mr. Bethune 'does for himself,'" mused the Deadhead. "We will go further into the matter." He proceeded to go further into it—*via* a side window, carelessly left unlatched—and much to the interest of a tall, lantern-jawed, bulbous-browed gentleman who chanced to stroll past at that moment—just in time to see the Fitz-Percy's heels and Molossus' tail vanish into the house. The stroller was none other than Fin MacBatt, *en route* to the village inn.

The valet paused, with a low whistle.

"Now, what is Grandpa after in there—the old housebreaker!" he said. "He'll be getting himself into jail if he doesn't look out."

He reflected for a moment, then followed in the track of the Deadhead, whom he found examining a writing-desk in an untidy, belittered part-studio, part living-room, part pigsty, facing the road.

In his hand, MacBatt noted, was a child's cheap football!

"A curious piece of property for a man who lives alone and, presumably, has no children, Fin, my good fellow!" said the Deadhead, after greetings. "Let us explore further."

They did so. They found many things which bore not at all upon their affair—and one which did: an old cork from a whisky bottle, one end of which, charred and burnt, was half rubbed away.

When, presently, they came out, having left everything exactly as they found it—the Fitz-Percy was nodding little contented nods to himself, Mr. MacBatt's eyes were glittering oddly with a fell and fighting intent, and even Molossus appeared to wear a toothy grin as of anticipation.

"*Sherlock* himself couldn't have done it neater, sir," said MacBatt a little huskily.

The Deadhead smiled faintly.

"I fear, my good MacBatt, that you are a flatterer!" he said gently.



There was a snarling flurry and a sharp cry from Bethune as the big dog pinned him just above the back of the knee.

"No, sir—not a flatterer, sir," replied the blue-jowled one, with an avid and anticipatory glare back at the bungalow. "More of a flattener, sir—as I hope you'll see when I get hold of the blaggard—if he's the man that blackjacked *me!*"

The Fitz-Percy laughed, and they proceeded at a good pace back to Longlands.

THE shades of night were mobilizing before Mr. Bellamy Bethune's "grid" came once again to a stop outside the bungalow, and its black-eyed owner unstraddled himself from off it, and pushed it up the weedy path, and into its den—a small shed at the side of the house.

Then Mr. Bethune selected a key and let himself in at the front door.

It was practically dark in the hall-living-room, but he had not advanced two steps, fumbling for matches, before he stopped, stiffening slightly, glaring round, like an animal or a man who senses that something is wrong. His hand flew to a side pocket of the Norfolk coat he was wearing—an odd instinctive movement—and then he stepped back sharply toward the door, still facing the room.

"No, you don't, my man," said a swift, crisp voice, and Mr. Mallandan sprang out of the shadows at him. Bethune gasped, but struck like a snake as he gasped. He was a big, powerful man, and Mallandan reeled back, nearly upsetting Merlin O'Moore, who was moving up swiftly at Mallandan's side.

Bethune wrenched open the door and plunged out into the twilight—straight into the arms of the dour, and now dangerous MacBatt, who apparently had crept round from the side of the house to block any possible exit.

MacBatt, ever eager, swung a punch at the man that would have almost fractured his skull, but the artist ducked skillfully, and brought his elbow with savage force against the jaw of the valet, staggering him for a fraction of a moment. Then, with a crazy yell, Bethune darted down the path to the gate—even as the door opened again and Messrs. O'Moore and Mallandan shot out.

"Look out, Molo!" shouted Merlin, as MacBatt wheeled to pursue the flying Bethune.

The big, fawnish body of the fighting dog flashed down the path, and seemed to run into the fugitive exactly at the gate. There was a wild, snarling flurry, a sharp cry from Bethune as the big dog pinned him just above the back of the knee, and they saw his hand go up, throwing something backward. It fell with a thud at Mallandan's feet, just as Molossus pulled the man down, only to be beaten off by Merlin, who knew what would happen if the fighting dog was not "steadied" at once.

MacBatt and Mallandan attended to Bethune, who, lamed by Molossus, gave in almost at once. . . . .

Two minutes later they were all once more in the bungalow where they purposed examining Mr. Bethune.

To them, as MacBatt lit the lamp, came Mr. Fitz-Percy, carrying something which he set gingerly—very gingerly—down upon the table in the lamplight.

It was a round object, rather larger than a cricket ball, made of roughly finished metal with a number of spiky projections upon it.

"That, my young friends," said the Deadhead, in his calm, pleasant voice, "is a bomb! Originally meant for you, Jack, and your wife, but later intended by its charming and impartial proprietor to blow us one and all permanently across the Styx. Fortunately he does not appear to be quite so expert with real bombs as with the football cases which he has used hitherto. He threw it just as Molossus snatched him—and it fell at your very feet, Jack, my friend. . . . . Luckily for you, something was wrong with its works—but I should not touch it, MacBatt, if I were you. These things are very fidgety, I understand. Let sleeping bombs lie—until the police arrive," he concluded, for the valet had given signs of being about to pick it up and listen to it—though what he expected to hear it is impossible to say.

"Quite so," said Merlin. "Let us examine its owner instead!"

BUT they made no examination, for as they turned to the would-be murderer, the man began to laugh and they realized that it would need a greater expert than any one of them to examine with any success a man who could laugh like that, for it was the dreadful, blood-freezing laughter of a man of completely unbalanced mind. Still, it explained everything. They no longer wished to examine him nor hurt him—they were merely sorry for him. In the midst of that frightful mirth the horn of a car sounded outside, and the Deadhead hurried out.

It had been a part of their original plan that Mrs. Mallandan should come on with Blackberry Brown, when the Pariah was trapped, to see if she could identify the admirer who had become her persecutor.

But that was impossible now.

Briefly and tactfully the Fitz-Percy explained, and went on the car to the town, some three miles away, to get the right people to deal with the man, while the ladies, escorted by Molossus, returned to Longlands.

From the capture of the Pariah to his departure with those who would know how to deal with him, the man said no word which would shed any further light on the strange affair.

AND they were glad enough to let him go unquestioned—even the vengeful MacBatt—for as the Deadhead modestly put it after dinner that evening at Longlands: "What, after all, my dear young people, remains to be cleared up? The man was a stranger of ill-balanced mind who retained sufficient sanity to succumb, like many others, to the charms of Miss Clover Sweeting, but failed to retain sufficient will to keep his wild jealousy of Mrs. Mallandan within the orthodox limits. Why he called himself the Pariah we shall never know—probably because he was a pariah. Nobody—as yet—seems to know anything at all about him, except that the statement that he was an artist was untrue, and that he had merely rented the bungalow on a furnished tenancy—and, incidentally, regularly refrained from paying any rent. . . . . He will be looked after—we may be sure of that. And I have no doubt that the football season is past. How say you, Merlin mine?"

The Deadhead finished the *liqueur* with which he was fortifying himself.

"You have all been so kind as to elevate me into the position of hero of this affair," he continued. "But that, my dear people, is more characteristic of your generosity than your logic. What I did was to make a wild shot in the dark—or, in other words, to consume several pints of quite surprisingly good ale with a number of village gossips at the inn. But the man to whom your thanks are really due is the dour MacBatt, who deposited upon the countenance of Mr. Bethune the black eyes which aroused my curiosity. But for that I should never have examined his motorcycle tire, searched his house and found, in the scullery, the used burnt cork with which (unnecessarily, to my mind) he disguised himself when following you to town. And now,"—reaching with his usual stately grace for the green chartreuse close by—"let us forget all about the matter, and devote ourselves whole-heartedly to studying the bright side of things—as I am sure our grim collaborator, MacBatt, is doing in the servants' hall. . . . . My children,"—he raised his glass—"may you, and everyone else, be forever happy!"

Which was a tall order—but characteristic of the Fitz-Percy.



Collins advanced to administer some advice; but Red misunderstood. He swung for Collins.

Hard-Boiled Holbrook

By HERBERT L. McNARY

He became known as the bad boy of baseball before the excitement subsided—an engaging tale by the author of "The Man with the Glass Jaw."

Illustrated by William Molt

"YES sir, Red, take it from one who knows: You've gotta be rough, tough and nasty to get by in the big leagues." Gabe Rawlings weighted this dictum with the authority of a small-town oracle as he settled more firmly on the nail-keg, leaned back against some bolts of gingham on the counter, pushed aside some auto accessories to obtain elbow-room and casually thrust his hand into Bert Howell's cracker-barrel.

Gabe's impressive glance encompassed the attentive circle of general-store politicians like a revolving camera.

"I *know;* I've been to New York," he emphasized, alluding, as he skillfully managed to do in almost every conversation, to a journey he made appear commensurate with a flight to Europe. Gabe subscribed to all those courses which transformed you from a wallflower to a Jack Donahue in six lessons, gave you the charm of a Chesterfield or enabled you to recall instantly the names and telephone numbers of prominent citizens of Seattle. Gabe might be small potatoes on Broadway, but he was the Solomon of Main Street, Crofton, N. H.

"Red" Holbrook, the obliging cause of this advice, seemed unusually subordinate for a young man whose name had but a few days before appeared in numerous metropolitan journals. Tucked away in a corner of a sporting page you must have read, "The Romans yesterday purchased Red Holbrook, hard-hitting third baseman of the Winston, Ontario League, Club."

"You've gotta chaw more terbaccy than the next man—" Gabe began.

"I never chawed," confessed Red blushingly.

"Wal, you gotta learn," reproved Gabe. "A rookie's gotta make an impression. You

don't git on speakin'-terms with the regulars till you take 'em under the stand—"

"What's under the stand?" asked Red innocently.

Gabe swept the circle with a glance commiserating for one so ignorant. "Don't you read the papers? And you a professional ball-player! That's where you fight the regulars. That's the only way they'll recognize you. And the umpires!" Here Gabe paused for effect. "You gotta show 'em from the start where they git off, or you'll never git a close decision s'long as you play ball. When the manager hops on you, why, you come right back at him so's he'll respect you."

Gabe became thoughtful and lowered his voice. "You'd better not let on you come from Crofton, Red—you'd better pretend you come from New Yawk. Say, '*foist*' and '*thoid*' and '*boid*.' "

THE next day found Red setting forth, viewing the trip with trepidation, but with a grim determination. For all his awe of Gabe, a strong chin and red hair were not wasted on him. This hair resembled the fur of a red fox in color, and Nature had waved it in a manner to cause any girl to protest against the injustice.

At the start of the journey, Red bit a segment out of a brown plug, but when the train pulled up shortly at the end of a White Mountain down-grade, the masticated bite went into reverse. Hours later a very sick youth decided that if chewing ability decided one's big-league career, he couldn't catch on as a bat-boy.

The train unloaded Red upon a city at the peak of the morning rush hour. Raging floods of swollen traffic streams engulfed and pounded the red-headed boy from the bushes; but while punishment glazed his sky-blue eyes, he merely set his jaw firmly. His answers during the clerical formalities when he finally located the Romans' park were as short as the questions given him, and an offended secretary sent him down to the field hoping for the worst.

"Tell Murph he can cancel practice now that you've arrived," the secretary sent after him; but Red had his own prearranged ideas of introducing himself to the manager of the Romans.

Murphy was seldom in a mood, during the morning workouts, to giggle over a traffic-violation summons or an income-tax blank, and pyrotechnically resented a resounding slap on the back as he stood at home plate bawling out the first-sacker for gumming a bunt. He turned belligerently on the tall, slender intruder.

"Hello, Mucker," greeted Holbrook, appropriating a cognomen uttered only from the security of the final row in the grandstand. "I'm Holbrook, your new third—thoid baseman, the boid what's goin' to put your team in foist place." Red gulped. He had put Gabe's *"thoid," "boid"* and *"foist"* all into his initial utterance.

Murphy lacked some of Red's stature, but he packed considerable more poundage than when he crouched behind the plate—and he held a fungo bat in his right hand. But anger sometimes is like an alternating current; it reaches a point where it reverses. Murphy substituted for mayhem the usually more effective sarcasm.

"Hard-boiled, aint yuh? Hard-boiled Holbrook, that's you. Now that you've already won us the pennant, I'd better have the judge end the season."

This attitude only confirmed Gabe's prediction. Red remembered his instructions to raise the ante.

"I'm rough, tough and nasty," declared Red, though he had a sickening sensation that his voice vibrated in similar wave-length with his knees. "I'm so tough I wash with vitriol, use emery for soap and dry myself on a sandpaper towel, and I'm the sweetest thoid baseman that ever buried spikes in a man's neck."

Murphy stared at him almost dumfounded. He blinked his eyes. "Zat so? We'll see. Go in and tell Doc that Jimmy Collins is in the league again and wants a suit. Then come out and try an' play third—pardon me, *thoid*. That's the sack down there on the white line."

HOLBROOK entered the club-house and started a debate with the shirtless trainer, but finally emerged toward the close of the morning session wearing a Roman traveling uniform. He walked out and shoved a white uniformed individual off third base.

"One side, Fallin' Arches, and make way for Flamin' Youth."

The Roman looked up with a grin, ready to share in the joshing of a regular, but froze at the sight of a stranger in a gray traveling uniform.

"Go on," barked Red. "Try the bench. That's where you'll be playin' from now on."



Cobenze could handle himself as well as any man on the team, but the storm of punches took him by surprise.

The Roman stared at Red, and then suddenly broke into laughter. He started to the bench to spread the news, and on the way chirped to Kohley, a pitcher batting fungoes, "Get the bird-cage dusted—we got a new cuckoo."

Red dived into fielding practice with aggressiveness aggravated by nervousness. He knocked down grass-singers and burned the ball across to first with bullet throws that caused the big, good-natured Cobenze to glare at him. Murphy dropped a bunt along the foul-line, and Red pounced on the rolling ball and shot it to first.

"I'll let you take a fountain-pen if you want to autograph the ball," cried Murphy. "Make the play in one motion."

"I can take my time with the whip I got," retorted Red.

"Somethin' in that," grunted Murphy to Keady, catching at the plate, "but it wont do to let him know it."

The session ended a few moments later, and the veteran players strolled to the clubhouse. Red accompanied them in the mental attitude of a candidate marching to initiation. "Let 'em start," he told himself. "Let 'em try to bull me! The first bozo that opens his mouth—"

"Say, kid," said the well-meaning Cobenze, "let up on that wing of yours—"

"I'll meet you under the grandstand!" exclaimed Red quickly.

"Huh?" blinked the first-sacker.

"I'll meet you under the grandstand," reiterated the excited Red.

"What's under the grandstand?" asked Cobenze.

"Looks like he wants to take you on," declared Crab Haley, the Romans' scrappy second-sacker. "Go on, Bill, lead him under the stands and spank him."

"Listen, kid," advised Cobenze, "act your age—"

"I'll meet you under the grandstand."

"Aw, hell—come on!"

Red went, trembling with fear—not physical fright, but panic that he might make a sorry showing and lose caste. Consequently when the big Cobenze squared off, Red leaped at him like a panther and threw his fists like the late Harry Greb.

Cobenze could handle himself as well as any man on the team, but the storm of punches took him rather by surprise. He countered stiffly, but the hysterical Red knew nothing of the blows until a jolt on the chin set him down. The cool loam felt inviting, but Red bounded to his feet, and he was climbing over Cobenze when Murphy appeared and enforced an armistice. Whatever the Romans' opinion as regards an ultimate decision, they had to admit that the fresh recruit had the ability to back up his poison-ivy disposition.

RED made his début one day when Mencken's fast-breaking curves kept most of the ground balls on the first-base side of the diamond. He went to bat a second time, having had nothing harder to handle in the field than two pop flies. The first time he stood at the plate he trembled inwardly because of his own conviction of a rookie's initiation. Crab Haley had aggravated his foreboding.

"Now don't get nervous," Crab had urged with assumed sincerity. "They always try to dust off a rookie."

"Yeah?" grunted Red. "Well, if that baby tries dustin' me off, he's gonna return to dust sooner than the insurance-company figures." But this was a forced front.

When Red came to the plate, Chick Neaton, back-stopping for the Grays, turned to Tim Collins, the umpire, and drawled through his mask: "Tim, here's Hard-boiled Holbrook, the kid who eats crushed stone for cereal."

"Funny cracks from a funny face," barked Red. "No wonder they got you behind a mask."

Collins laughed; Neaton said nothing and signed for a fast one. It streaked past the peak of Red's cap. Red started up the path to the mound.

"You toss another like that, and I'll wrap this bat around your neck!"

"Get back here and do your stuff at the plate," called the umpire.

But Red received a great hand from the local fans, who in any sport will respond to a show of aggressiveness. The applause swelled to a roar when Red lined a double to left that brought in the first run of the game. He walked on his second appearance, after arguing with Collins over two called strikes—to the great glee of the fans. The third visit to the plate resulted in a single for Red. This marked the occasion of his last appearance at bat for the day. In the seventh inning a Gray tried a bunt. Red raced in, pounced on the ball along the chalk-mark, and got his man at first.

"Foul!" cried Collins after some hesitation. The fans voiced their disapproval.

"What?" roared Red as he dashed in to protest. Now, like a good umpire Collins believed in starting every young player with the knowledge of just who was boss. He whipped off his mask and advanced down the chalk-line with policemanlike strides to administer some advice; but Red misunderstood the gesture. He remembered Gabe's instructions about asserting himself where umpires were concerned. He swung for where the mask should have been protecting Tim Collins' handsome Celtic features. A few moments later two policemen quelled hostilities. . . . .

Thus Red won a fine, a suspension and a reputation. Long before he arrived in the various cities of the circuit, the bleacherites accepted the stories that he licked half a dozen cops a day for setting-up exercises and shaved with wire clippers.

Red's mates, however, allowed him much time for introspection. They argued for him and with him, but excluded him from their bench conferences on real-estate deals and from their bridge games while traveling. They considered him a throwback to the rowdy days when players carried their bats to and from the park for protection.

However, Red stood ace high with the home fans, while the Romans as a team were as popular as a spade draw to a heart flush. Before the season started they had been picked as favorites for the pennant, but a veteran pitcher cracked, and two other star twirlers acquired lame arms in spring training. A team with shot twirlers is like a racing car with missing cylinders. The middle of June found the team deep in the second division. Red's arguments and color provided the fans' only recompense.

With opposing players Red indulged in those personal remarks which the business aspect of the game has relegated to the fans, such as biting reference to a player's age and slowness of foot. Under the circumstances one can hardly blame pitchers from being tempted to put fast balls close to Red's cap; but in justice to them it can be said that Red crowded the plate to the limit.

On one hectic day Wilson, pitching for the Blues, started a debate with the umpire, insisting that His Honor repeatedly missed strikes. Wilson had walked the two

previous men when Red sauntered up to the plate. He crouched close to the rubber and let a ball whiz by. The umpire called it a ball. The Blue wheeled around in protest, and Wilson came running in.

"What was wrong with that?" he barked.

"Wide of the plate," answered the arbiter. "Buy a copy of the rule-book and see where the ball must cross the plate."

"What good's a book to him?" taunted Red. "He signs his pay-check with a cross."

The pitcher shifted his ire to Red. "How'm I gonna get a ball over with you standin' on the rubber?"

"I'll take care of him," declared the umpire. "Get back in the box."

Holbrook set himself close to the plate and guessed the next pitch would be a curve. But guessing is bad business in baseball. Too late Red saw the ball wasn't going to break. The next instant his head seemed to explode like a magnesium flash.

SLOWLY Red's eyes opened, and he saw about him a whiteness as soft as an enveloping cloud. In succession his laboring senses identified a milky ceiling, a creamy wall, snowy bedclothes and finally a stiff white habit and a funny little white cap that perched like a dab of marshmallow on golden brown hair. He wondered if the eyes were blue. "Hey!" he blurted.

They were blue, blue as a sun-sparkled lake back home. . . . .

"Oh, are you awake?"

"Well, if I aint, I hope they let me dream on. I didn't know angels bobbed their hair." He struggled to an elbow.

"Lie down," she commanded in a cool, assured voice. He fell back instantly, and then, offended with himself for obeying so readily, he sat up again.

"Lie down," she ordered again.

"Who said so?" queried he who defied umpires and police.

The blue eyes widened just a trifle. "I said so."

"Yeah? Do you know who I am? Hard-boiled Holbrook of the Romans." He waited in vain for her to be impressed. Instead he saw the cherry lips form again for that command he associated with his setter dogs. He pushed back the clothes defiantly and then stared at his sleeves.

"Holy cats! Who stuck this night-shirt on me?"

"I did," said the pretty nurse calmly.

Red's chin sagged. "You didn't undress me?"

"Of course."

He fell back on the bed as helpless as if he had been caught flat-footed off second. The nurse sat down at the table again to write something on a chart. Red became conscious of a dull pain in his head and recalled his accident.

"What place is this?" he asked.

"St. Gertrude's. Don't talk."

"What did they bring me here for?"

The young nurse rose and looked towards the bed. "I told you not to talk." The blue eyes held him, steady and compelling. And while he wondered at the power she exercised over him, a tall young doctor entered the room, and standing beside the nurse, smiled upon her familiarly. Red acquired an instant and violent dislike for him.

"How's the patient, Shirley?" the doctor queried.

"Restless, obstinate and unruly," she answered, and passed him the chart.

"He has that reputation," remarked the doctor, discussing Red as if he were not present. "That's why they call him Hard-boiled Holbrook. A fire-cracker from the East Side. We'll have to give him an opiate."

"Is zat so?" contributed Red.

"Yes, that's so," snapped the doctor, and then as Red attempted to rise he changed his tone. "Come on, act sensible."

"Don't argue with him, Doctor," said the nurse from the table where she was fixing tablet and water. "He'll take it!"

HE took it; and went to sleep—but the pretty nurse remained with him in his dreams. The background, however, was that of his New Hampshire hills.

He awoke with mind foggy, to find a room plunged in a shadow of mystery and quiet. He raised his head and saw a dim shaded light and a white uniform over by the table.

"What time is it?"

"Eleven o'clock. Go to sleep." But the voice sounded anything save like a purling brook. He furrowed his brow.

"You don't sound like Shirley."

"Shirley has been relieved."

"Put on the light so I can see."

The night nurse turned the rays and revealed a countenance as harsh as Shirley's had been sweet.

"Gimme another opiate," murmured Red ungallantly.

When he again awoke, brilliant sunlight flooded the room; sunlight he had known in the White Mountains; and the scent of flowers threatened to bring on an attack of nostalgia. Now he saw his nurse with her head buried in some deep red roses she had just placed in a vase.

"Who are the flowers for, Shirley?"

She looked up, startled, then composed herself. "*Miss* Shirley," she said coolly.

"You let the Doc call you Shirley!"

"It is a hospital custom to call nurses by their last names."

"Holy cats, I thought Shirley was your fir—foist name. What is your foist name?"

She seemed not to have heard, and to be interested only in the roses. "Evelyn," she said softly.

"Evelyn," he repeated as though tasting the name. "I like that! Maybe they should have named you Rose. You seem crazy about 'em. I should think you'd get sick of 'em in this place."

"I never will," she said with feeling. "It is the most enjoyable part of my work to take care of them. It is like bringing the country in here."

"Do you like the country?" he asked eagerly.

"Love it." But she was not looking at him.

"Well," he said after some hesitation, "I suppose you find it hard to get used to a big city. Me,—I'm from New York—Thoid Avenue."

THE nurse made no comment but began to lay out towels.

"Say," asked Red suspiciously, "what's the towels for?"

"Your bath."

"*You're* not gonna give it to me," he cried in a panic as he pulled the bed-clothes tightly about him.

"We are short of orderlies," she said evenly, "but I have secured one for you—this is he now." But the sound of footsteps developed into another delivery of flowers. "You have many friends," said the nurse as she took the box.

Red laughed bitterly. "I bet that's poison ivy from the umpires. Did you ever see me play?"

"I never saw a ball-game in my life."

"I forgot. You're from the sticks. But after I get out of here, Evelyn, you'll have to come to the game as my guest."

"I don't make engagements with patients."

"Only with doctors, I suppose—like the sheik who was in here last night!"

SHE colored in rebuke and her tone became official again. "I have no association with men outside the hospital. I have more than enough here. The orderly will be here in a moment. You can keep your rudeness for him." She left the room, and Red flushed in embarrassment. Later when she came with his breakfast, he apologized, but she refused to be drawn into conversation; and he only saw her again that day on brief occasions.

Red forgot that the sun was shining next morning when a strange nurse informed him it was Evelyn's day off. Then Murphy and the physician went into conference by Red's bed, the gist of which was that while the doctor advised against sending Red into a game for two weeks, St. Gertrude's no longer desired to keep him from bench duty.

Red rankled at the decision that banished him from the hospital on Evelyn's day off, and on the following morning he returned to enter protest. He refused to accept the switchboard-operator's statement that the nurse was too busy to see him, and finally Evelyn had to come to him in an anteroom.

"You wanted to see me?" she asked in a voice as cool as her white habit.

Red fumbled with his cap. "I wanted to thank you for takin' care of me."

"I get paid for that. Is there anything else?"

"I'm sorry for what I said about you goin' out with doctors."

"I believe such a remark is in keeping with your reputation on the ball-field."

He looked at her in surprise. "I thought you didn't know anything about ball games or ball-players."

She flushed and bit her lip. "I read the papers. And now you will excuse me. I am very busy this morning."

The Romans left for the West that night, and Red accompanied them; but the team stumbled through two series before Murphy inserted him in a game. He struck out his first appearance at bat, and as the inning ended, Murphy, coaching at first, waited for Keady to come in from the third-base line.

"Looks like the bean ball did a job on Hard-boiled like it has on others," ob-

served the manager regretfully. "Red had a foot in the bucket." For he knew that baseball history is dotted with players who developed a tendency to pull away from the plate following such an accident.

"A bird as fresh as him will get over it," grunted the coach hopefully.

But Keady proved to be no better prophet than the weather man. Red faded in both batting and battling averages. St. Gertrude's had discharged a different Red Holbrook from the man carried in on a stretcher.

When the Romans returned home, Red still languished on the sack he had won because of his hitting ability; but now this batting average had shriveled like a punctured balloon. While his wonderful arm enabled him to make an assist on anything he could reach, too many hot shots squeezed through his position to permit the retention of a weak-hitting third-sacker on a team in a slump.

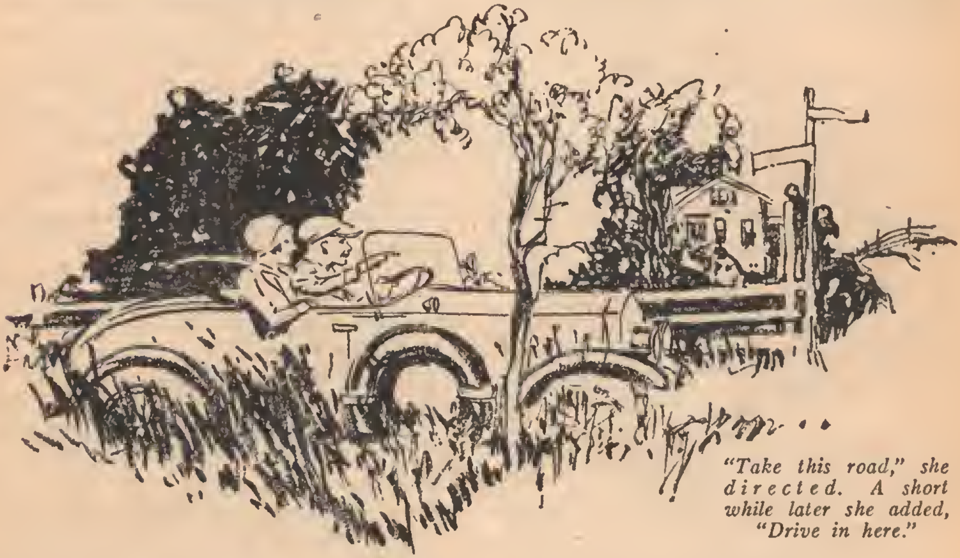
"Somebody's gonna be back on Thoid Avenue soon," chirped Whitey Nelson, the Maroons' coach, as Red returned to the bag after fouling out in a pinch. The freshest kid in baseball had no reply. A moment later he chased a foul pop to the grandstand and watched it drop out of reach. He waited to see if the ball would be returned. Then he stared in surprise. Just a few seats from where the ball had dropped, sat Evelyn Shirley. She saw him discover her, colored and looked away. Red returned to his position and crouched over, hands on his knees, while his heart pounded like an ancient flivver on a hill. . . . . . That evening he hurried to St. Gertrude's and asked again for Evelyn.

"I saw you at the game this afternoon," he stated tremulously. "Did you go to see me?"

Her eyes tightened for denial, but before his look of entreaty she relaxed.

"Yes, I was curious to see you play."

"Then you must have been thinkin' of me," he insisted, delightedly. "It's almost a month since I was here."



"Take this road," she directed. A short while later she added, "Drive in here."

Again she framed a denial but he anticipated her.

"Aw, Evelyn, you're a lonely kid from the country, and I'm a lonely guy from—New York. You said you didn't go out; and I haven't been anywhere with anyone since I left home. That's why I tried to make a date with you. Can't we go some place some evening?"

"I'm sorry," she said regretfully, "but I've changed to nights." If he had been as conceited as thousands of fans supposed, he might have imagined that she changed her hours so as to be free to watch him play afternoons; but he saw only the further obstacle in his path to her friendship.

"I have Sunday off," she suggested.

He brightened eagerly. "Sunday? That's a break! We don't play Sundays in this burg." Then he sobered. "But where can we go Sunday? I can hire a car if you want to go ridin'. I got a license."

"I'd love to—if you'd let me pick the place."

"Anything you say, Evelyn."

On Sunday, Red sat behind the wheel of a hired roadster. Evelyn nestled beside him and told him where to make the turns.

"Take this dirt road," she directed after they had been riding for more than an hour. A short while later when they came to a blackberry-covered stone wall and a clearing she added, "Drive in here."

He followed the grass-grown wheel marks and at her suggestion pulled under a huge maple. He lifted out a large hamper she had provided, and they dropped down on the grass. Evelyn, as if lost in a trance, stared at the scene unfolded before them in the brilliant sunlight. The green clearing stretched to a distant grove of pines streaked as with chalk-marks by occasional slender birches. In the center of the clearing and far back from the road stood a small cottage house, and beyond this the land dipped and rolled like an unfolding carpet down to a little blue pond.

The house to a practical eye appeared in need of paint, and replacement of several panes of glass; a blind or two hung askew. But Evelyn saw it as it might be.

"Isn't it a darling of a house?" she breathed, curling her ankles beneath her.

"It could be fixed up a bit."

"A little paint and I could make it shine like enamel," she went on, her dreamy eyes fixed on the house. "And the blinds could be painted green. At the corners I could build lattice work and cover them with rambler roses. Then there is all that land on which to raise prize dahlias and zinnias, and in the pond I could grow prize lilies."

"Who lives here?"

"No one now. It has been tied up in the settlement of an estate. The house and land can be bought for three thousand and a mortgage of three thousand more."

"I should think you'd had enough of the country after livin' in it all your life," he suggested.

The dreamy light passed quickly from the blue eyes and then her expression clouded. "I never lived in the country," she said slowly. "That is probably why flowers and fresh air mean so much to me. Until this year I spent all my life in New York, most of it on Third Avenue."

The color mounted in Red's cheeks.

"That's where I said I came from," he confessed without looking at her, "but except for a series we played there in June I was never in New York in my life."

She looked off toward the pond. "You come from a little town in the White Mountains," she said.

"How did you know?" he exclaimed in surprise.

"You talked about it that first night in the hospital, and I listened. You spoke of a field covered with goldenrod and of a little blue lake and a purling silver stream."

He pulled a large blade of grass and examined it carefully.

"You must have an awful opinion of me after the way I talked when I was awake."

"Oh, no. I never mind what men say—I'm a nurse." Then she turned to him with eyes wide and frank. "Why did you pretend to come from New York?"

"Gabe told me to."

"Who is Gabe?"

It struck him funny for a moment that anyone should question Gabe's identity.

"Why, Gabe lives in Crofton. He said I wouldn't get by unless I was rough, tough and nasty, and never let 'em know I came from a hick town."

"Did it help you to be—hard-boiled?"

"It made me a lot of enemies, I guess. Well, the laugh is on me. That ball that sent me to the hospital finished me. I can't click the apple the way I used to, and it was my hitting that won me third base. The Romans have been goin' tough on account of our pitching staff. Murph's been gettin' so much pannin' he'll have to make some changes. That means I wont be hangin' round long."

"Do you have to be a good hitter to play ball?" she asked innocently.

He smiled. "You do unless you're a pitcher."

"Is that the man who stands in the middle and throws the ball hard at the bat?"

"That's him."

"I thought you threw the ball harder. Why don't you be a pitcher?"

He smiled again and turned toward her. It was the first time he had really looked at her when she was not in uniform, and now he stared. The curve of her neck—

"Gee," he exclaimed impulsively, then stopped. Evelyn turned to him.

"What did you say?" she asked.

"I'll tell you some other time," he evaded. "You just gave me an idea."

THE next morning in the workout session Red sought out Keady, the coach of pitchers.

"Hey, Mike," he said. "I used to have some nice curves when I was a kid."

"Yeah? I had the measles myself."

"No foolin', Mike. You know I got a lot of swift. Murph needs pitchers bad. It's too late to trade for 'em. Well, with a couple curves I think I could be a pitcher."

"You think a lot of things," grunted Keady. "But get a ball. I might as well play catch with you as the next one."

A half-hour later Keady shifted a lump from left to right cheek. "You got a sharp hook," he grudgingly admitted, "but you advertise like a cigarette company. What we want to do is get all your pitches with the same motion. That will make the hop on your fast one more effective." And Red, who understood Keady and his moods, felt elated.

Before the Romans departed for another swing of the circuit, Fraser had returned to third base, and the sport writers had already composed the epitaphs of baseball's bad boy.

In the first series away from home, when the cellar champs bombarded the Roman hurlers for eight runs in three innings, Murphy sent Red to the mound. His smoking hop changed a slugging bee into a pop-up party. He finished another game a few days later, but as both were already lost before he appeared, his switch from infield to mound gleaned little publicity other than that Murphy was so hard up for twirlers that he was using infielders. He started a game against the Grays and ran a consecutive string of eleven scoreless innings to twenty. He captured two more verdicts before the Romans came home.

The Braves once won a pennant by rotating three pitchers. Murphy attempted to repeat. He shifted the cagey Whitman to the rôle of relief hurler, and worked Holbrook, Kohler and Mencken with splendid success. A string of eight consecutive victories for the Romans revived pennant hopes. The race was pretty close, and the Romans proceeded to smash their way to the top like one of Cæsar's legions.

The final series of the year found the nation watching the clash between the Romans and the Maroons in a postponed play-off at Maroon Park. Holbrook won the pitching assignment. He had his hop working well, and his curve broke sharply —too sharply, perhaps, because he seemed to be missing the corners. He walked four men in three innings, but the Maroons disappointed their followers by failing to knock in the runs. The Maroon twirler was as parsimonious with his hits, but Murphy, playing for one run, squeezed Carrington home on two sacrifices.

The Maroons came to bat in the ninth with the margin of the one run against them. Red tried to make his pitches extra good, and with the usual result he walked his man. The next Maroon attempted a sacrifice. Red tried to keep the ball close and ticked him. The Maroon stands went into an uproar as the two home players went to second and first. Whitman began to warm up for the Romans. Red tried to convert a sacrifice into a force-out at third, and all three men were safe with none out. The Romans held a conference around the box, but Red's grim jaw satisfied Murphy.

Red whipped over two strikes on the next Maroon, who had been instructed to wait Red out. He ticked a sharp breaking curve, but Healy held onto it and retired the man. Red had the next batter one and one, when he swung at a low-breaking curve and cracked the ball to Red's left. It appeared destined for an open space over second, but Red dived across the path of the ball and made a desperate clutch. The ball stuck in his glove. Red rolled to his feet and slammed the ball home ahead of the runner. Healy stepped on the plate and threw to first for a lightning double play that gave the Romans the right to go into the World Series.

ON the evening of the following day Red Holbrook waited outside the nurses' quarters of St. Gertrude's Hospital.

"I had to win that game," he said in answer to her congratulations, "so I could get a World Series share. I need it to cover an option on our cottage."

"*Our* cottage?" she repeated, flushing.

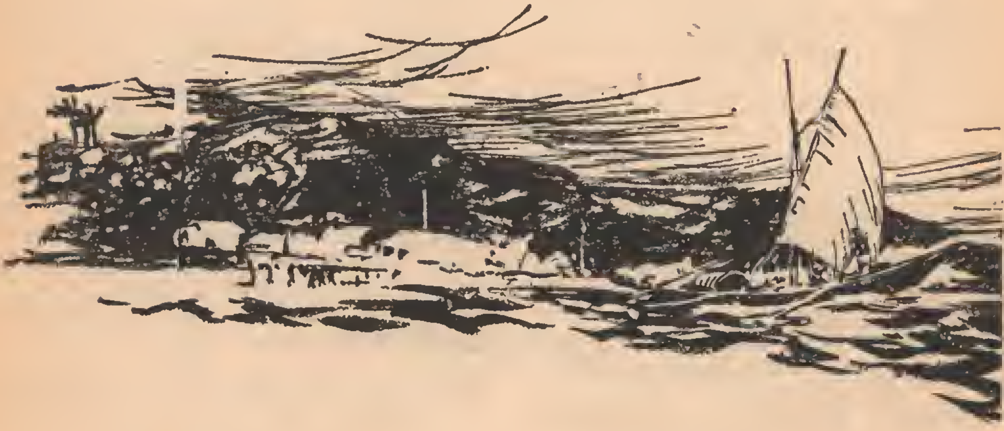
"Yeah. The little cottage you brought me to that Sunday. Remember I started to say something out there, and then I stopped? I was goin' to say what swell curves you had. That reminded me that I used to throw some sweet curves as a kid. You had just told me that I'd ought to be a pitcher because I had so much speed. Of course you didn't know that speed aint enough for a pitcher. But speed and curves—well, you gave me the idea. Then Murph and Keady made a pitcher out of me. Speed, that's me; curves, that's you. And the combination means a little white house at the end of the lane where the prize zahlias and dinnias grow."

"Dahlias and zinnias, silly!" But he smothered her correction appropriately.

The Hostile Island

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Illustrated by William Molt



IF you've been much in Singapore, you doubtless know Sparks — Rudolph Sparks, head of the Inter-island Trading Company. A big, hard man, self-made, merciless to inefficiency, a graduate of a stern school. No sentiment in him. He judged solely by results—and he was a severe judge.

I was a lawyer, and had put over some lucky deals for him, both in and out of the law.

This evening he had summoned me to meet him at the club, but he was slow in explaining his business.

"There's a mystery in it," he said, "and I hate mysteries when they touch my pocketbook. This one has touched it hard."

The soft-footed boy set drinks on the table, Sparks signed the chit, and the boy slid quietly off. Along the verandas rose chatter, gay light voices, while music drifted to us from inside. Before and below us lay the dark hills and valleys, the lighted streets that led into the garish maw of Singapore.

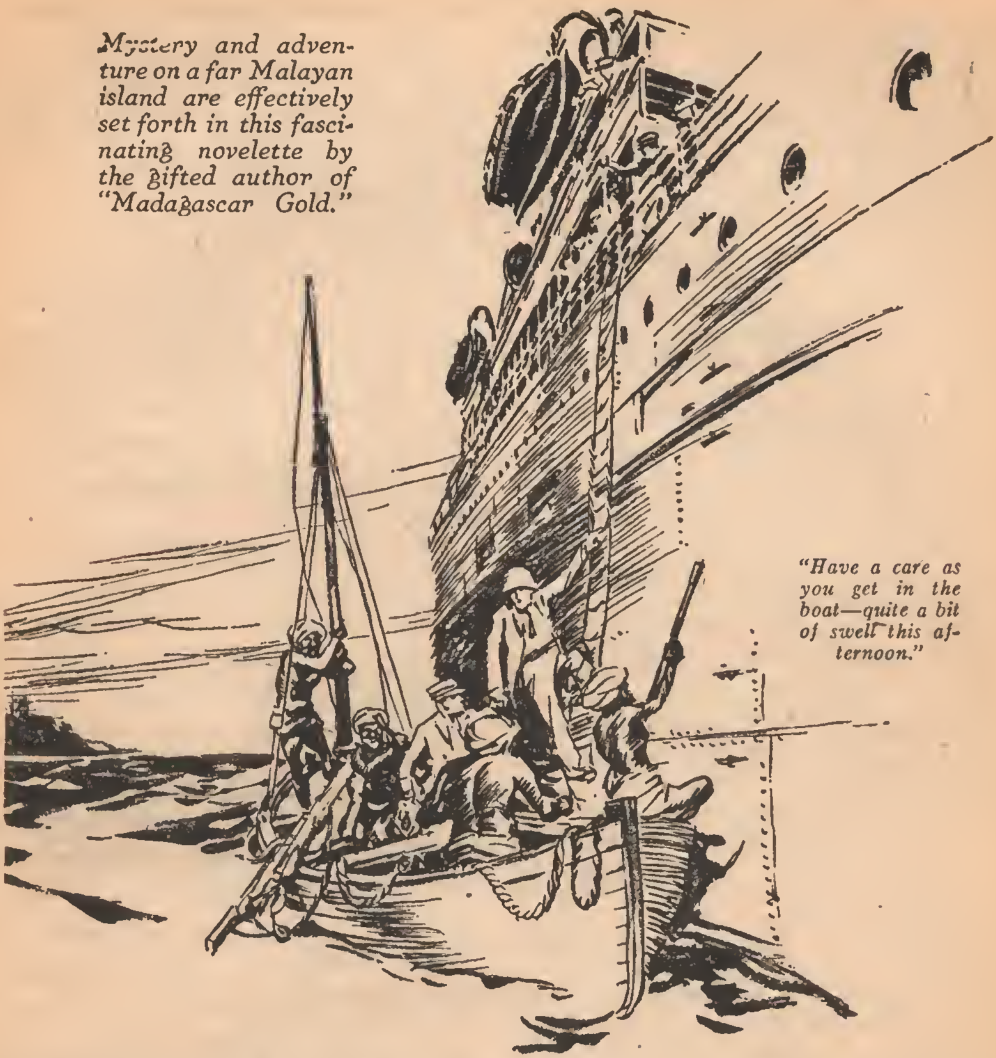
Up out of the city came drifting, very faintly on the evening breeze, the sweetened blare of a military band. From the compound floated a breath of flowers, and the stars glittered high and white over all. A garrison officer, in brilliant mess-jacket, crossed the veranda. A motor-horn honked on the drive.

"Chin-chin!" said Sparks, and lifted his drink.

"If it's a mystery," I said, "you need a detective. I'm a lawyer."

"Don't be a fool," said Sparks, and fumbled for his cigarette-case. "Look here, now! I made a mistake and I'm paying for it. I sent a chap named Cochrane to take charge of our station at Kuala Bat, up the mainland coast. He was the best man available when we got the concession, last year, and it looked like a big thing.

Mystery and adventure on a far Malayan island are effectively set forth in this fascinating novelette by the gifted author of "Madagascar Gold."



"Have a care as you get in the boat—quite a bit of swell this afternoon."

Instead, it has cost us heavy, one way and another, and I'm tired of it."

"Never heard of such a place," I said. "By the name, it's a tide-mouth."

SPARKS nodded. "Island outside a river-mouth. I want you to go there with full authority and raise the lid for me. I'm tired of it."

"You're hardly the sort to hang on to a losing proposition long enough to get tired."

Sparks grimaced. "This Cochrane has played me like a fool," he growled. "So has Tanjan, a Malay chap. I trusted this Tanjan, made him Cochrane's assistant. They've had me fair, let me tell you. They've played me for a fool."

"Anybody who can do that to you," and I chuckled, "is a rare bird. Who's Cochrane?"

"Nobody much, by appearance. However, little men are often big inside. That's where I slipped! He's a small man, quiet, well-poised—too devilish well-poised! I thought him strong, but he's weak. His character is nil. He's failed all down the line. Will you take the job?"

"I'm listening," was my evasive reply. "I didn't know you had a concession up there."

"Tin." And Sparks lowered his voice. "It's a legitimate dodging of the export duty. You may remember a Frenchman, Bonn, who went busted after the war? His concession was independent of the

government export tax—certain clauses in it gave him a free hand. We discovered them after we took over the concession."

Knowing Sparks and his methods, I saw light. He had let the Frenchman go bust, or had deliberately busted him; through his agents, he knew all the time what the concession was really worth, and had bought it in. He could sit back and export tin free of tax, while everybody else in Malaya paid through the nose. You can see for yourself what such a concession was worth—contract, agreement, or whatever it was! Sparks did not go into details. He only sketched high-lights.

"You've actually lost money on such a thing?" I asked, incredulous.

"You may well sniff," said Sparks bitterly. "Blast me if I can figure out what's gone wrong. Cochrane can't get any tin shipments. He says there are strikes at the mines up-country, that big Chinese dredging firm went smash, and so forth—always some excuse. The mine on the island doesn't pay, and so forth, etcetera. Now, that's sheer inefficiency! I can't get anything coherent out of Cochrane—he slides me along smoothly. Meantime, other people are shipping out plenty of tin and paying for the privilege."

"Is there a boycott against you?"

"No. And that tin mine on the island is a good one—"

"What about your man Tanjan, the assistant?"

"A good man. Still, I can't get anything definite out of him either—he writes me mysterious rot that doesn't mean anything! I'd like you to poke in there and let on you're a government scientist or something, and find out—"

I ridiculed this notion, straight from the shoulder.

"Not much," I said flatly. "I don't criticize any man's business methods or ethics; they depend on his personality. I have a hard enough time trying to live according to my own lights. But I don't go under false pretenses. I go as your agent, or I stay here, understand? No false pretenses!"

Sparks eyed me. "My Lord, how I'd love to hear a bishop say that!" he exclaimed.

"What d'you mean?"

He gestured with his cigarette. "What you've just said is the essence of tolerance—"

I cut him short. Sparks was not a religious man and loved to argue against religion.

"Get back to the subject," I said.

"All right. Five hundred quid for you as a retainer. More according to the time spent."

"Explain the mystery before I accept," I said. "What is it?"

HE hesitated. Sparks detested anything that eluded his practical brain. Shrewdness had won him success, but shrewdness is not penetration. When dealing with natives, his lack of imagination handicapped him. Your Malay is really a gentleman, accepted even by Englishmen as a kindred soul, and they like him above all other subject races. Sparks, however, never understood Malays, and they seldom understood him.

He produced a letter and threw it down on the table.

"I've written Tanjan three times," he growled. "There's my answer, blast him!"

I unfolded the single sheet. The Malay writing was not in Arabic, but in Roman characters, only the signature being in Arabic. I could not blame Sparks for failing to understand the curt, pithy note:

I, who am only a beggar, serve a rajah. The business can wait. Belum sudah!

"What are those last two words?" said Sparks, watching me. "The fool is educated—why not write in English? He knows I'm not up on Malay. What are those two words?"

"A contraction," I said, "meaning that the work is not yet finished. However, your Tanjan is evidently from up north. He says '*patek nen fakir*'—I who am only a beggar. Around these parts, you'd never hear anyone use '*nen*' for '*yang*.' I should say he was irritated by your letters and scribbled this note in a hurry, not caring much what came of it, and hoping to satisfy you with the mystery. Instead, he's stirred you up. Who's the rajah in the case?"

"Blessed if I know," said Sparks. "There's no rajah around there, to my knowledge! My idea is that Tanjan has taken to drugs. Ordinarily no native would dare send me such a contemptuous message. Well, so much for him! Then, here's more of the confounded mystery. No one by this name is known around here, and there's no other white man up there—"

He produced a large envelope sealed with a coat of arms in red wax. It was addressed to John Sobieski, care of J. T. Cochrane, care the Inter-island Trading Co., Singapore. It bore several Polish stamps and a Warsaw postmark.

"Is your man a Pole, then?" I asked.

"Him? Pure Scotch with a hint of cockney." And Sparks sniffed. "If you take the job, you can deliver this letter. May lead you somewhere. There's a steamer north tomorrow noon that can drop you at Kuala Bat. I'll give you full authority to act for me. What say?"

"I'll go," was my answer.

MY steamer was a big coaster and could nowhere near make Kuala Bat. We lay some three miles off, and waited for the native boats to come out. The mainland was still farther—a greenish-blue mass banked against the horizon.

In the strong afternoon sunlight, my prismatics brought up the island clearly. It was six miles long, three wide; a cluster of brownish-red, naked peaks jutting out of the sea, belted about the lower portions with a heavy green jungle. Midway of the island was a small native village, dominated by a large bungalow on higher ground behind. At the shore were two long godowns, their corrugated-iron roofs painted white. A long wharf ran out, where coasters of light draft could tie up. Such was Kuala Bat; no tempting sight.

Two boats were putting out. One was a native prau piled with fresh fruits, the other a whaleboat manned by natives, with a white figure in the stern. I gazed with interest at Cochrane as his craft leaned over to the afternoon breeze and approached us. He was sailing her well, a keen aliveness in his features—obviously, he loved the urge and pull of the boat, the rush and thrust of the waves. As Sparks had said, he was a small man, very compactly built, his features small-boned, well cut, teeth showing white as pearls when he smiled at his men.

A Jacob's ladder had been wiped clean and lowered. Cochrane brought his boat in beneath it, the sail was run down, and he came up and over the rail. There was no time to lose, as the captain wanted to be on his way and said so. I came up to them, and was introduced. Cochrane gave me a quick grip and a straight look.

"Visitors are rare here," he said to me. "You're from Mr. Sparks, perhaps?"

"Yes," I responded.

He showed no confusion nor embarrassment, but nodded quietly.

"Just the one grip? Right. I'll take it. Have a care as you get in the boat—quite a bit of swell this afternoon. Can I wangle any newspapers out of you, Cap'n?"

I went on down the ladder and made the boat safely. Though my grip was small, it was no easy task for Cochrane to carry it down the swinging ladder; he managed it, and then caught a roll of newspapers dropped down from above. There was a chorus of farewells, the whistle blew, and the steamer moved disdainfully away without regarding the fruit-boat.

I studied Cochrane keenly, as we drove in toward the island. There on the ship he had been quiet, poised, controlled; now, busy and intent upon the wind and the rush of waves and the long hissing surges shoving us onward, he stood revealed—all alive, vibrant, every sense keyed up and joying in each thrust of the steering-oar. For this moment the mask was lifted, and no matter what I might unearth, I now knew this little man for a soul of flame and a body of steel wire. He was clear to the sight, with about as much weakness in him as you would find in a flawless jade.

The steamer's smoke trailed down the wind and she became an invisible belching volcano over the horizon. Cochrane stood braced to the oar, the five Malays chewing betel-paste and keenly enjoying themselves; I noticed a respectful alacrity in the way they obeyed orders. As I knew from sad experience, steering a whaleboat before the wind is a ticklish matter, yet it was done to a nicety. No coral in these waters, I thought, or he'd never use a whaleboat.

The island loomed higher ahead. I got out my glasses and examined it attentively. From the cove, where lay the wharf and godowns and village, a tiny track ran back into the belt of jungle as though heading between the two bare peaks farther up and behind. A miniature railroad, I judged, serving the tin mine Sparks had said was on the island. It could not be much of a mine since the population was scanty, yet the tiny steel tracks glittered brightly as though kept in use. The godowns were empty, however. I recalled Sparks' declaration that nothing had been shipped from the station—either goods from up-river or from the island itself.

Cochrane flung me a glance, and I de-

tected a slight smile in his eyes, not on his lips, as though he quite understood my thoughts and were inwardly amused.

On the wharf to greet us stood a Malay, alone. He was unusually tall, and instead of wearing a bright sarong like the other natives, he wore European whites with a scarlet sash about his waist, in which was thrust a kris. His white skull-cap showed he had made the Mecca pilgrimage. Beneath it, his dishlike features were dark, composed, rather proud.

A MOVEMENT drew my glasses to the bungalow above. There on its veranda, surrounded by a compound of flowers, was a black figure—a woman. I saw only this much, with a glimpse of her white face, when she turned and vanished inside. Did Cochrane have a wife, then? Sparks would have mentioned it.

A queer impression came upon me, and grew. Not from definite causes, but from the odd poise of Cochrane, the way his brown men looked at him, the immobile figure on the wharf, the woman who had appeared and gone, the glittering little rails running into the jungle, the lonely naked-peaked island with its fringe of twisted mangrove-roots showing above the ebb tide, like a floating Medusa's head surrounded by dead reptilian hairs. Mystery—a sense of uncanny things, strange out-worldly things, clear away from all the humdrum city life of Singapore. Singular that it should so come to me here in the white-hot afternoon sunlight, on the sparkling water, the breeze thrusting us on buoyantly!

Yet there it was, and instead of lifting as we drew into the wharf, the impression only deepened. Tanjan came forward and made a salaam, then calmly disregarded the line flung by the bowman; it missed the post, was flung again, caught. The sail was down. A man leaped to the wharf and the buffers along the gunnel scraped the posts.

"Welcome to Kuala Bat," said Cochrane, and held his hand to steady me. "We can make you comfortable, I think." As I stepped to the wharf, he addressed Tanjan in Malay. "Is all done as we ordered?"

Tanjan made another salaam. "I have attended to all as you ordered, *tuan-ku*."

I stared at this, as well I might; also, he had used the word "patek" for the first person singular, a term rigidly restricted to use when addressing royalty. Court language used between a trader and his assistant—hm! Not in mockery, either; the brown chap was extremely respectful.

"You've had tiffin, of course?" Cochrane set out with me, Tanjan following with my grip. "Yes, it's getting late. Well, you can get settled down, and then we'll have a drink. Comfortable place here, to make up for it's being rather lonely. You'll stay until the regular boat comes along next week, of course?"

I nodded. "If I may."

"May?" Cochrane laughed. "My dear fellow, you're a blessing to us!"

"You might change your mind," I said, with meaning, "if you understand me—"

"No,"—and his voice was sober, restrained. "I understand—but no. You're the one who doesn't understand! It was a blow when I saw you. I thought Sparks would come himself, was all ready to have it out with him. Well! I'm glad we wont have any row."

Thought I to myself, but wont we, though! So he had expected Sparks in person, eh? And was ready. I kept my mouth shut and thought hard. This little man was no weakling, no coward. And he was clever. It was up to me to watch my step.

So we went on up to the bungalow.

My host did not mention the woman, though he must have known that I had glimpsed her. As we came up to the bungalow, I heard the thumping of a gasoline engine; this, he explained, brought up water from the creek for the house and compound. The latter proved a gorgeous place, massed with flowers of all sorts, and a gardener in scarlet sarong gave us a salaam as we passed to the steps.

"This place used to belong to a Frenchman named Bonn—you know?" he said, and I nodded. "Bonn went broke, or rather was broken, and put a bullet through his head. It's quite an ugly story. I'll tell you about it later."

A queer ring to his voice warned me, and I said nothing. He pointed to the wide veranda.

"Sparks sent me up here to take charge after Bonn's death, last year. Bonn did himself well, eh? A fine little place. Sank a lot of money in it. Bonn was a confiding sort of man, by all accounts, the sort who'd take a man's word as gospel and not demand a bond. You never knew him?"

"No," I replied. "A friend of yours?"

"No, never heard of him until I came here. He died before I arrived."

I was puzzled by his manner. He led me in through the bungalow; it was large, well built, and handsomely done up. A pair of house-boys salaamed deeply; all the respect shown Cochrane would have proved in itself that Sparks had been very much amiss in his judgment of the man. Malays require a reason, and a good one, for showing such respect, since they are a proud race.

Cochrane showed me into a fine bedroom, Tanjan set down my grip, a bath was drawn, and I was left alone.

Thirty minutes afterward, I strolled out on the veranda, wondering a little at the elegance of the house—almost luxury. The walls were adorned with a few trophies and many weapons, very handsome krisses and shields and old arms, while some magnificent Borneo brasses stood here and there. I had just lighted a cigarette, when Cochrane appeared—and with him, the black-clad woman.

"Ah! I thought you'd be out here," he exclaimed. "Fine breeze, eh? By the way, I'd like to present you to Mrs. Bonn—the widow of Charles Bonn, you know."

So I met the lady.

CHAPTER II

It was, to me, a queer meal served us in the dining-room—odd both in the things and persons around. As for the things, they were perfect. Bonn or his wife had appointed everything to the queen's taste, from linens to china; yet it was singular finding them on an outlying coastal islet.

Cochrane was not in the least awkward or embarrassed. As his words had betrayed, he quite understood why I was here, and yet he was supremely unworried, played the perfect host, and was full of good stories about far corners of the world. He had, apparently, been everywhere and everything, and before the meal was over I marked him down as a man of deep learning and a thoroughly cultured gentleman. A bit unusual for an island trader, one must admit.

The two house-servants were, like Tanjan, northern men; they showed it in scraps of talk and in small ways innumerable. They were stalwart little fellows, wore European whites, and lived in a small bungalow at the rear with Tanjan. While they did not use court language in speaking with Cochrane, they were deferential enough, and a shade more so toward Madame Bonn—though for her they did not exist. I thought it somewhat strange that she would so pointedly ignore them.

Naturally, all my interest was centered upon this woman, so unexpectedly found here. I knew Sparks was quite ignorant of her presence, for he certainly would have mentioned it. And I wondered. By guarded queries, for I sensed keen antagonism, it presently appeared she had been here ever since Cochrane came—that is, ever since the Inter-island company took over the concession and property from Charles Bonn, her husband. However, she apparently had offered him no opposition, for they were on excellent terms. I was a little suspicious here, to tell the truth, yet quite without reason. Nothing familiar showed between them, only a cheerful friendliness. She spoke English fluently.

"Madame Bonn has been of great help to me," said Cochrane, perhaps scenting my thoughts. "Without her, I could have done little with the place."

"Have you done very much?" I queried, with bland irony. He chuckled.

"More than you'd think, upon my word! Show you after dinner."

She was faintly amused—everything about her deserved the same adjective, I thought. She scarcely spoke. Like many Frenchwomen, she ran to nose, though not obtrusively. She was a very demure little woman, all black and white—dead black hair, dead white face, carmined lips. Most undistinguished, one would say, almost without character; no great strength in her lines—to all appearance a colorless widow.

However, her eyes told a different story. They were sharp gray under black brows, and with heavy lids. Look at any man of affairs, any man who gives orders—any Kitchener. There are her eyes; the heavy lids never lie. And so, though we talked of politics and the new naval base at Singapore, and the revolutions up north in China, and the boom in rubber, all the while I could sense the sharp brain of Madame Bonn reaching and prying, trying to read my thoughts—appraising me.

Coffee was served on the veranda; it was just the hour when twilight merged into darkness. From the window behind us came a subdued glow of light, sufficient to make our cheroots enjoyable.

The widow rose and left us, almost as soon as the weeds were going, on pretense of having letters to write before the next week's boat. She said good night very softly, and her fingers clung to mine for a moment as we parted.

For a space Cochrane and I sat in silence. Few birds were on the island; except the rustling of the long leaves, and the murmuring whisper of a big casuarina tree outside the compound, there was no sound except the sibilant roar of the surf breaking along the beach. Being without coral, the island had no outer reef. Cochrane did not speak until his cheroot was finished; then he tossed it out among the darkened flowers, and broke silence.

"Do you want to tackle business tonight?"

"As you wish," I replied. "There's time."

"None like the present. Want to see the books alone, or let them back up my words?"

"The human equation seems to enter into this affair rather largely." And my words were dry enough. "Let the books wait on demand. You're not a liar."

Cochrane laughed a little. "I was tempted to be one," he said, "until I got acquainted with you. I'd like to have sent you back with an earful of lies, to bring Sparks here and get the truth. He'd get it. You're not like him. You're a decent chap, and I'm sorry to meet you on an inimical basis."

This, of all things, was the last attitude I had expected him to take.

"Why accent the enmity?" I demanded. He took a fresh cheroot and gave me another—nice Borneo tobacco, mild, with the indescribable tang one comes to like far above Havana.

"It's not personal," he rejoined, his cheroot-tip glowing and glowing. "Sparks sent you to look into things, of course?"

"Yes."

"That's all right—you're helpless to interfere now, for my work's about done here. You noticed the godowns were empty? Only last week I got off a thundering big shipment—stuff had been piling up here the past month."

"Sparks didn't know that, then," I said, in some surprise. "He thought you'd done nothing at all since coming here."

Cochrane laughed a little. "I've done plenty," he said. "Would you like to hear about Charles Bonn?"

"If you like."

"It's well worth going into. Bonn was a Frenchman, born out here. His father had a couple of good tin mines—open-face up-country. When the war broke out, Bonn was a youngster, wealthy, everything before him. He went back to France and served throughout the war. While he was away, everybody looted him—chiefly the Inter-island people. He came back with mighty little left out of the wreck; brought a wife with him. You met her tonight."

COCHRANE paused, puffed reflectively, took up his story again. A breath of sweetness lifted from the flowers, was gone at once on the salt breeze.

"Bonn was a fine chap, straight as a die by all accounts, but trusting. About the only thing left him was this island concession—very valuable in the right hands. He built a fine place here for his wife; you've seen something of it already. The little tin mine back in those naked hills was a bonanza, and little by little he began to get his affairs into shape. Then they began to go bad again. The Inter-island people went after him, and Sparks sent up a confidential man to put him out of business—a slick worker. This chap got into Bonn's good graces, played friend, and deliberately wrecked him. It was a rotten affair, I can tell you. Mrs. Bonn was away in the hospital when most of it happened. She came back, saw through the chap, and kicked him out—but the harm was done. Bonn was wrecked, and shot himself."

"Bad story," I commented, "if true. But, you see, I know Sparks."

"Would you put such work past him?"

Being a lawyer, and knowing Rudolph Sparks, I preserved a discreet silence on this direct query.

"Sparks," I countered, "is merciless in business relations. On the other hand, his word needs no written backing."

"So Bonn thought," said Cochrane grimly.

"I'd not believe for a moment," I went on, "that Sparks would deliberately send a man up here to wreck Bonn treacherously. Wreck him in business, of course—and without scruple as to means. But not as you suggest."

"Excuse me a moment," said Cochrane, as though accepting my dictum. "We might have a drink, and I keep the liquor locked up."

He slipped away into the house. I be-

gan to have a very faint suspicion of what the talk was coming to, yet the actual truth was far beyond me.

PRESENTLY one of the Malays came out and set a small table in the glow from the lighted window. He went back and then returned with siphon and glasses, and departed again. Cochrane came along presently with a decanter—nothing so mistakes, and when Rudolph Sparks dictated the second paragraph of this letter he had made probably the biggest mistake of his career. I could sense the whole thing now, accurately enough, although dimly.

Cochrane silently filled glasses from the siphon. I reached out, sipped my drink, then sat back and examined the letter again.



I held the sheet of paper against the light, scrutinizing it closely. It was a damning thing.

crude as a bottle in this house! He set it on the table, then took a small flashlight from his pocket, switched it on, and handed it to me.

"Take this, will you?" he said calmly. "Now, if you'll read—"

I accepted a sheet of paper from him, and held it against the ray of light.

It was a letterhead of the Inter-island Trading Company, from the private office of Rudolph Sparks. It was addressed to a man—let him be nameless here. He was the agent Sparks had sent up to wreck Charles Bonn. It was curt and to the point; in two brief paragraphs:

> *Your report received and approved. When you return from Kuala Bat your pay-check will be waiting for you as arranged.*
>
> *Wreck Bonn financially, personally, morally —all ways.*
>
> *Rudolph Sparks.*

A damning thing. I scrutinized it very closely—genuine paper, genuine signature, initialed by Sparks' private secretary—no chance of mistake here. Every man makes

"As representing Sparks," I said slowly, "you know I ought to destroy this letter."

"I'm safe in trusting you," said Cochrane. "You're a gentleman."

"Unfortunately for Sparks, yes."

He took the letter again, folded and pocketed it. I switched off the light and laid it on the table.

"You recognize the truth of my story about Bonn, after reading this?"

"The evidence is indubitable," I said slowly. "Mind telling me where you got it?"

"Not a bit," he returned with frankness. "I came along here a fortnight or so after Bonn shot himself. Tanjan came with me—Sparks found him footloose, knew he had a good record, and employed him. An excellent man. Tanjan obeys me."

"More than that," I said.

"Yes, more than that. Well, Mrs. Bonn—Madame Bonn, really—was pretty well broken up. After kicking out Sparks' agent, she had found this letter in his room; the fool had thrown it into a trash-

basket. Now, you mustn't misjudge either her or me. If you know Frenchwomen, you know they'll act like men—sentiment for the one, practical common-sense for all others. And at the present moment I've a girl waiting for me in Glasgow."

"Go ahead, go ahead," I said, and reached for my drink again. "You and I understand each other pretty well, old man."

"Right. Well, the more we became acquainted, the more I realized what a rotten deal she had met with in life—thanks to Sparks and the Inter-island. She was practically penniless, for everything was grabbed. The papers were legal, but the thing behind the papers was damnable! And being in full charge here, as I whipped affairs into shape I saw where I could right some part of the wrong that had been done. I couldn't give the woman's husband back to her, but I could give back some of the stolen money—stolen, that is, ethically."

I FELT a trifle shaky at hearing this, for it showed only too clearly what was about to come next.

"In the past months I've done very well indeed with the place," went on Cochrane, quite calmly, even complacently. "I've turned over thousands of pounds' worth of business—got a lot of stuff from up-river for shipment, most of it consigned to the Inter-island. I made arrangements for everything to be consigned to Bonn instead. You know, by the contract he signed, all consignments to him were to go through in his name—a clever joker. Sparks' agent knew there would be no more to him, savvy? Well, I changed this little point. Instead of the money going into the Inter-island coffers, it went elsewhere. Mrs. Bonn has touched every cent of it. I'm not one penny embezzler on my own account, and she has even arranged to return my salary from Sparks—I'm giving her my services, in other words."

This astonishing confession came from the man easily, naturally, as though he were describing an ordinary process of business. For a moment it struck me dumb. My first thought was that he might be mentally or morally atrophied—one of these not unusual persons who are unmoral rather than criminal. I had to dismiss it. He was too poised, too fully cognizant of right and wrong, too sturdy altogether.

"In very plain words, if you'll forgive them," I said, "you've betrayed your employers and have stolen from them."

"No," said Cochrane resolutely, as though he had long since weighed and discarded this accusation. "First, I've undertaken to reimburse this widow for what was actually, if legally, stolen from her. I've done it illegally, to be sure—admitted! But my conscience is clear in this regard. Every cent of my salary will be refunded before I leave here."

"I'm not worried about your personal responsibility," I said dryly. "I'm representing the Inter-island. Look at it from our standpoint, Cochrane. Regardless of ethical right or wrong, you've embezzled our funds—some thousands of pounds, eh? That means court and prison."

Cochrane laughed—a little laugh of sheer amusement tinged with confidence.

"Ah, but does it?" he said. "I'm perfectly willing to go into court. I'm giving my future address when I leave. I've nothing to hide."

"Eh?" I demanded. "You actually say you're willing to go into court—"

"Certainly," he broke in. "Certainly I am. As a lawyer—are you?"

In the gloom, I saw him tap his pocket, where the letter from Sparks reposed. And the ghastly surety of his position staggered me. He might well be confident! Once given publicity, this letter would absolutely ruin Rudolph Sparks, if not the Inter-island Company itself.

Yes, Cochrane might well be amused.

CHAPTER III

THE evening was young, flower-scented, enwrapped in stars and sea-horizon, and we two alone there looking out at the dark-glinting waters. I daresay you will think I did not act in the proper manner, considering my exalted station as a barrister-at-law and representative of Rudolph Sparks; but then, I act to please and suit myself, not others.

Somehow, I felt sorry for Cochrane, close to him, sympathetic with him. Idealist as the man was, his position held a certain loftiness, amounting almost to nobility. Sitting here in the middle of the ocean, I could visualize his viewpoint clearly enough. He was dead right, and I might have done the same had I been in his shoes—though I did not tell him this.

"I don't think this matter would go into

court, as it stands now," I admitted frankly. "That letter is damning. I know Sparks to be unscrupulous, and yet I would never have believed such a thing except over his own signature. It rests with me, in the absence of communications, to handle the whole affair on behalf of the company. First, suppose you let me know your plans, if you have any."

"Willingly," replied Cochrane. "Bonn had a good many friends up-country, you know—native and white. They've turned a bit of traffic in this direction. The final lot of stuff is coming down tomorrow, I expect. I'll have quite a bit of tin—it's been smelted on the mainland, at the Kajong workings—from my own mine here, and more from up-river. Then there should be a good miscellaneous lot. Say, a couple of thousand pounds' value in all."

"Whew! Sparks was right," I commented dryly.

"He is, in business. This place is rich. Well, a coaster comes in day after tomorrow and takes out the lot—takes me and Tanjan and Mrs. Bonn, too."

"Tanjan's in on the game, is he?" I asked. There was something else I wanted to ask about the Malay, but could not place it. This astounding news from Cochrane drove everything else out of my head. "Queer such a man would be unfaithful to his salt."

"He takes his salt from me," said Cochrane. "I've rather confided in him, you know—but never mind. The point is, we all clear out day after tomorrow. Madame Bonn goes to Europe, and I may follow, or may not. Depends on what action Sparks wants to take."

"Do you mean," I asked gravely, "that you intend to blackmail him further?"

"Do you think I do?"

"No," was my honest reply. He laughed in the darkness.

"You win. I had intended going to Singapore and effecting a settlement face to face with Sparks. No need of that, since you're here. I've made not a penny out of this job, remember. Guarantee me and Mrs. Bonn indemnity for all that's past, and the letter is yours."

Cheap at the price, I reflected. Sparks must pay through the nose for his folly. Such a letter would ruin the Inter-island in the island and peninsula trade, where a good deal depends on good-will. This offer, more than anything else, showed Cochrane's high quality.

"I've no authority to give you any such guarantee," I returned cautiously. "I'd want to examine that letter by daylight, though I'm convinced it's genuine enough. On the strength of it, I'd advise the company to accept your terms unconditionally, and certainly would advise them not to go into court. I am confident my advice will be followed. More than this, of course, I can't promise."

"That's enough," said Cochrane promptly. "It's settled. Well, here's luck and a good night's sleep to you!"

WE put down the nightcap, and he took me to my room, where a lamp was lighted, and we were saying good night when I suddenly halted him. My memory had picked up what I wanted to ask about Tanjan.

"I don't understand his use of language," I said. "He wrote Sparks he was serving a king; he uses court language when speaking to you. What does it mean?"

Cochrane hesitated, and appeared oddly embarrassed.

"I said I had confided in Tanjan," he returned slowly. "He's simple, and direct, unused to the European world. You are just the opposite. Where he accepts a fact as literal and beyond question, your complex brain would term it the hallucination of an unbalanced man."

"Hm!" I said. "Hardly, if you stated the fact."

He colored slightly with pleasure.

"Thank you," he said. "The fact is, then, that I *am* a king, by right of birth."

Gravely said. For the second time this evening, the man staggered me.

"But you're Scotch, or English," I countered. "Therefore, you could only be king—"

"Of England," he finished for me. "Yes. And that's it. Well, I'll tell you about it later on, if you like—I'm not anxious to bring it all up, though. It's nothing to boast of. Good night!"

I went to bed rather dazed—and small wonder. King of England, indeed! And by right of birth, which would preclude any bar sinister! Well, why not? The thing was nowhere near so improbable as it might sound. Some Continental ruler claimed descent from the Stuarts, I remembered. Then there was that ugly, hushed-up story about the Maltese family. Well, I thought, the future would show.

The only sure thing was Cochrane's

sanity. Of this, morning brought fair certainty. I was awake early, when Cochrane shoved his head into my room and waved a towel at me.

"We're off for an early dip—we've a safe place here. Want to come along? I've an extra suit that'll render you halfway decent—"

"You bet!" I exclaimed.

He flung a bathing-suit at me. "We'll be on the veranda when you're ready."

IN five minutes I was outside, and found Madame Bonn with him. She wore a trim one-piece suit, a silk robe over her shoulders, and gave me cheerful greeting. Cochrane was in high spirits. As we walked down to the beach, I noted his whipcord muscles—the man was like steel.

Owing to the strong tide of fresh water from the river-mouth, there were no sharks, and we spent a delicious half-hour in the cool of the morning. As we passed the village on our return, Cochrane called an order to the Malays there—something about the ore coming in, and about keeping a watch for the boats. Yes, Cochrane was very healthy, very sane, a splendid man—and perhaps a king by right. Why not?

We breakfasted with keen appetites. Madame Bonn was not nearly so reserved as on the previous evening, and showed herself to be a charming woman. My half-formed suspicions of her died away. She was sharp enough, but she was straight—or was she? I could not quite make up my mind. I wanted to believe her crooked, perhaps.

She made me ashamed of myself when, after breakfast, we settled down on the veranda and faced the situation frankly, with Tanjan squatting beside us in the respectful manner of the East. We had it out, and I liked her frankness. I said clearly that I would use my position to further the settlement on the terms already concluded.

Cochrane, the victory thus assured, became almost boyish in his exuberance, and we arranged everything in friendly fashion. Then some word flashed memory into me of the letter Rudolph Sparks had given me, and I excused myself and went to the room. The letter was in my grip. I got it out and returned to the veranda.

"Sparks gave me this to deliver," I said, handing it to Cochrane. "I suppose you know who Sobieski is, and can forward it."

His eyes widened, and then he stared at me over the envelope.

"It's for me! And—and I'm afraid to open it—"

"For you?" I said. "But Sobieski—"

"Is my name." He broke into a sudden smile. "Did you never hear of the two Sobieski brothers who came to England and Scotland in the last century, declaring themselves lineal descendants of the Stuarts? Their claim was true. They could not prove it because the proofs lay in Warsaw, and the Russian government refused any access. This letter—well, I've taken my mother's name of Cochrane, for if I called myself Sobieski everyone would think I'm a Pole. I'm not, though I speak Polish as part of my inheritance. This letter answers my appeal to the Polish republican government, regarding the proofs. It will either establish my descent—or smash the claim."

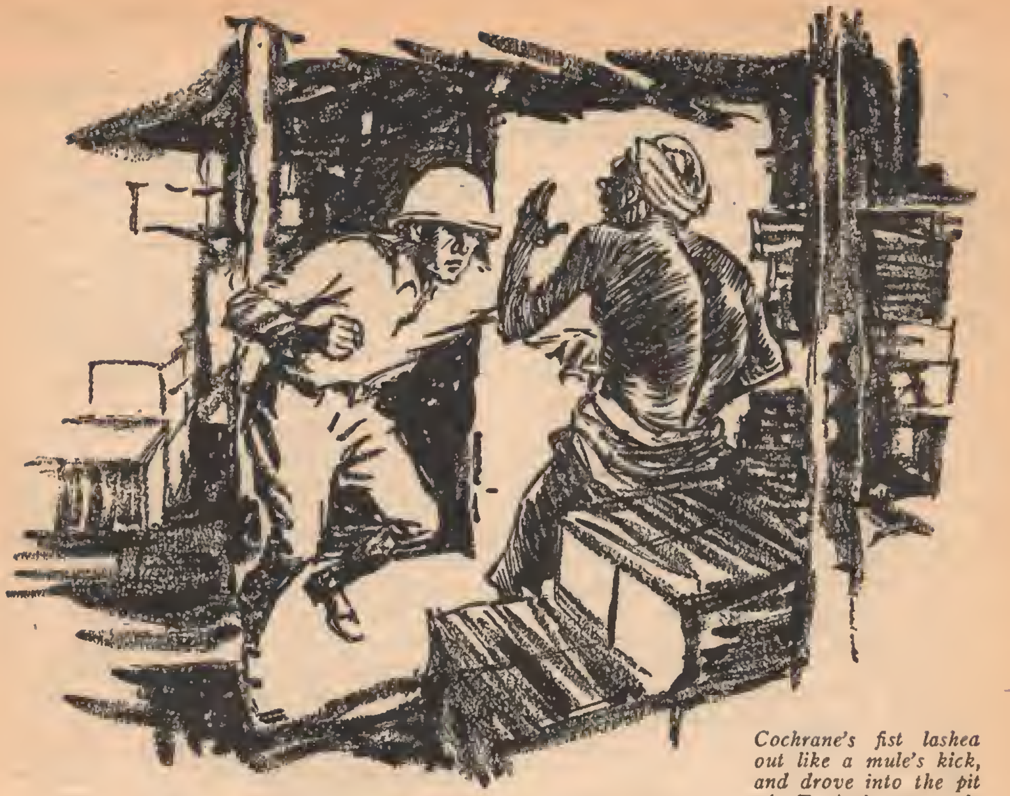
He stared down at the letter, turning it over and over in his fingers.

WE others said no word. I did have a dim memory of those two Sobieski brothers; but I knew little about them. King of England, indeed! The notion was ridiculous, though I could see Cochrane was not the sort to go around publishing his birth and making claims, however much he might believe in them.

Tanjan, who had drunk in every word, sat stiffly. In the regard he bent upon Cochrane was a queer quality—it startled me. It was almost ironic, with a trace of contempt. The look was gone instantly, yet had been there; a strong contrast to his extreme respect in speech and act. And abruptly, out of nowhere, I gained the impression of some drama behind the scenes, of some hidden play of forces.

Madame Bonn said nothing. I began to suspect her again, without reason—to suspect her of I knew not what. Perhaps merely because she was a woman. When I looked again at Tanjan, his eyes were veiled; yet I could not remember the fleeting expression I had caught without an uneasy twinge. Something wrong here, somewhere!

So Cochrane tore open his letter and read it. All three of us were watching him, but his face did not change—a slight contraction of the muscles, nothing more. Since he had taken us into his confidence about it, he now had to announce the result. He glanced up at us suddenly.



Cochrane's fist lashea out like a mule's kick, and drove into the pit of Tanjan's stomach.

"Do you read Polish?"

I shook my head, as did Madame Bonn. Cochrane folded the letter, pocketed it, and reached for a cheroot. His eyes were gleaming.

"My descent, my claim, are attested by documents in the government archives," he said, and held a match to his cheroot. Then he shrugged. "It means nothing, of course, except to me personally. I'm not bragging in the world's eyes, or setting up any claims to the throne of England. However, it's a tremendous satisfaction to me."

"I congratulate you," said Madame Bonn in a deeply rich voice, her words earnest.

"And I," said I. Tanjan rose and came before Cochrane and salaamed, then sat down again respectfully. Cochrane laughed, rather embarrassed.

"Well, that's ended—so forget it! Here's one of the villagers—I expect the boats have been sighted from the hill."

A MAN was panting up toward the steps. As the bungalow faced seaward, and was backed by the naked gray island peaks, naturally it had no sight of any craft coming from the mainland river-mouth. Cochrane had guessed aright, for the fisherman called to us that praus were on the way.

"Our promised consignment." Cochrane rose. "I must go down and see to things. Tanjan, will you come along? I'll need you, as you have the hang of their dialect better than I." He turned to me with an apologetic gesture. "I'm a poor hand at Malay, you know. They say it's easy, yet somehow it comes hard to me. Well, see you later!"

He went lithely down the steps and across the compound, Tanjan behind him. Madame Bonn looked after him, then smiled at me.

"It is pleasant here. You will be glad to be back in Singapore, though?"

"And you—in France?" I asked. She was smoking a cigarette, and waved it vivaciously.

"Oh, one is always glad to be back in France!" She rose suddenly. "Well, if you'll excuse me, I'll see to my housework and packing. We're leaving tomorrow, and I've hardly put a thing in shape. And I thank you for—for your sense of justice!"

She put out her hand to mine, frankly, gave me a cool grip, and went into the house. I liked this little gesture. I found

myself liking her—and fought against it. Like a fool, I still wanted to suspect her.

I took a fresh cheroot, settled back in my chair, and looked down at the gardener and a woman. They had come around the corner of the house, without seeing me above, and now stood in talk for a moment. Their words came to me clearly, and made me forget all about the cheroot and the match ready in my hand.

CHAPTER IV

"IT is true, O son of my father," said the woman, tears in her voice. "He goes on the steamboat tomorrow, and leaves me here. He has told me. He goes, and his brother goes, and Tanjan Hajji also—"

The gardener looked up and saw me on the veranda, and checked her.

"Come away, and talk of these things in another place," he said. But I leaned forward and spoke, from curiosity.

"Who is it that goes, then? Who is this woman's husband?"

"An unworthy slave of the house, tuan," came the response; and the gardener led her away, angry that she should have brought her troubles to my ears. He sent her off down to the village in haste.

I lighted my cheroot and reflected. So the two house-boys were going also! It looked rather thick, this general clearing-out. Another thing without any apparent motive or reason, this, and surprising enough. Tanjan might well go, either to keep Cochrane company or from fear of the Inter-island—yet why the two house-boys? They were brothers, evidently. They were from the north, like Tanjan himself. Something here eluded me. I felt there was a connecting link, yet could not put my hand on it. Mystery indeed!

It all made me suspicious—of what? I could not say. Little things heap up and are not to be laid aside like big things. Undoubtedly, there was some sort of nigger in this woodpile, and I became keenly interested in uncovering the dark gentleman. Cochrane had nothing to do with it, I knew—he had put all his cards on the table, frankly.

An hour must have passed, while I was reflecting vainly on all these things and getting nowhere. Boats came into sight, large praus, rounding the corner of the island and coming in toward the wharf below. I left the veranda and strolled down the path to the beach, keeping in the shade. The morning sun was already hot, and I had no helmet.

BY the time I got to the waterfront, the first boat was already tying up at the wharf, and three others were following. Cochrane had the entire village force at work, and cargo was being passed ashore and stowed in the godowns. Seeing me, Cochrane left Tanjan to direct the work and came over to me. He was eager, laughing, vibrant with energy.

"Hello! This will make old Sparks sick, I can tell you—it's going to be a tremendous shipment!"

"How does it happen," I asked curiously, "that he's never found you were shipping stuff from here?"

"I've covered our tracks pretty well," said Cochrane. "Besides, we've been rather careful about our shipping. This consignment, for example, goes to Bangkok. Our others went to French firms in Saigon."

"Hm!" I said thoughtfully. "Just why would Tanjan and the two house-boys want to go to Siam, now?"

He gave me a flashing look. "I asked the same question. Tanjan, I believe, is going into trading on his own, up there, and the other two with him. What's the matter—does the affair still look astonishing to you?"

"It puzzles me," I admitted. "Not your end of it, but the whole business itself. Madame Bonn, for example, is a very peculiar woman."

"Conceded," said Cochrane, with a nod. "Capable, though. By the way, you wanted to see the letter from Sparks—here, I've got it in my pocket. Give it back to me at tiffin, will you? I must hang on to it, naturally, until the settlement is signed up. See you later."

He thrust the letter at me, and then went back to the godowns.

This action of his suddenly opened my eyes, and I retraced my path to the bungalow very thoughtfully. As usually happens, Cochrane was exactly the sort of man he did not think himself to be. He had a certain simplicity—not that he was simple, but that he was very frank and open. He laughed at Charles Bonn for having trusted people too much, yet here he calmly handed over to me the very letter on which he depended to keep himself out of the penitentiary!

CALL him a keen judge of men, if you like, and flatter me; none the less, it was a foolish act. Had I been another type of man, my duty to Sparks would have impelled me to destroy this letter on the spot. As it was, I saw my duty otherwise, and had my own standards of honor. After giving such instructions, after deliberately wrecking Bonn as a man in order to get hold of his concession, after being practically responsible for his suicide, Sparks could pay for his mistakes so far as I was concerned.

Upon reaching the compound, I came upon the gardener working there, and halted. "Tell me something," I said.

"Yes, tuan?" He looked up at me.

"How long have those two house-boys been here?"

"A long time, tuan," he replied. "Tuan Bonn brought Sahak down from Trengganu when he first came here, and Busuk came a little while after."

"And which one wants to leave your sister here?"

"Oh! That is Busuk, tuan," and he shook his head. "But he wants to take her. Tanjan Hajji says he cannot, and so there is grief."

I passed on to the house, revolving this new item of information.

In any case, I might have guessed the house-servants had been here under Bonn, and probably had remained with his widow. It recurred to me as odd that Sparks knew nothing of her being here.

As I mounted the steps, she came out on the veranda and spoke in French.

"M. Cochrane is at the beach?"

"Yes," I said. "You want him?"

"I have been thinking." Her gray eyes rested on me a moment. "It would be better for him to go back to Singapore with you and arrange the settlement there. He would have nothing to fear, and it would be more—straightforward. No?"

Did she want to get rid of Cochrane? I wondered. Yet her words were plausible, for he had nothing to fear, truly; and it would be more satisfactory for him to arrange things with the Inter-island people personally. He had already stated that he would like to meet Sparks face to face.

"One of us," she went on, "must go to Bangkok with this shipment—"

"Then suppose you let Cochrane go to Bangkok," I broke in, "and you come along to Singapore. You can get a steamer direct for France there. Better, eh?"

I suppose she read the irony in my words, for her eyes flashed.

"No—the consignment goes in my name, and I must see to it and make collections in person. Also, I've arranged to stop with friends in Saigon for some little time. We settled all that this morning, I thought."

"All but Cochrane's going to Singapore with me," I said. "Very well; if you can arrange it with him, I'm quite satisfied."

I went on into the house. She was trying to get rid of him, was she? Or was it all imagination on my part? I did not know what to think.

Tiffin came. Madame Bonn flatly proposed to Cochrane that he accompany me to Singapore. I said nothing. Cochrane gave a thoughtful assent.

"Yes, it might be better. I'd like to avoid trouble, but I'm more than willing to tell Sparks to his face what I think of him. Eh?" He flung me a glance.

"As you like," I said. "We'll avoid any rows, I think."

"Then you handle the matter. Are you satisfied about the letter?"

I smiled. "Haven't had a chance to look it over. Do you want it back now?"

He shook his head and began to speak of the shipment being unloaded on the beach, and the matter passed.

AFTER tiffin, Cochrane returned to the beach despite the heat; Madame Bonn went back to her packing. I lolled lazily in the veranda shade with a cheroot. Busuk, the younger of the two brethren, as his name signified, was clearing off the table. I beckoned, and he came to me.

"Yes, tuan?"

"You are a faithful man," I said, not looking at him but staring out at the sea-horizon. "You serve Madame Bonn, and rightly. Still, it might be you would prefer to remain here with your wife, instead of leaving her and going to Bangkok."

"By Allah, I would!" he said quickly. "But I am forced to go. Tanjan—"

He checked himself.

"Why should Tanjan Hajji give you orders?" I asked.

"Why not, tuan? In the old days, he was master under Tuan Bonn."

Tanjan here under Bonn! One more new point, and this a startling one. I had a flash of sheer inspiration.

"Where is Tuan Bonn buried? I have not seen his grave."

"He left a chit asking that he be buried

with his father, near Malacca Town. So we took him there. It was a journey."

"Did you stay long in Malacca?" I queried, probing.

"Only two days, tuan."

"And what did Madame Bonn buy there?"

"Allah knows! Some black clothes, and a comb for my wife, and one of those machines that writes words—"

"A typewriter?" I asked swiftly. "Where is it now?"

"She did not keep it, tuan. It did not please her. Perhaps, if the tuan would ask, I might be allowed to remain here."

I nodded absently. He went on with his work and departed after a time.

A typewriter, eh? She had bought a typewriter in Malacca—why? I shrugged and got out some letters from my pocket—I had two from Sparks, emanating from his private office. Comparing them with Cochrane's letter, I found the latter to be indubitably genuine—but—

As I sat smoking, the thing came to me.

CHAPTER V

WELL, I had the secret—held it here in my hand, after all!

For perhaps half an hour I sat there, tugging at the loose strings, before realization came to me, swiftly verified. The trip to Malacca, the hitherto unguessed fact of Tanjan having been in Bonn's employ at an earlier date, gave me the clue I had lacked. And with the discovery came the staggering question of how to utilize it.

Madame Bonn did not appear again. Presently Busuk came across the veranda on some errand, and I called him. "Go and tell Tuan Cochrane I wish to see him," I said.

He departed. I sat gazing out over the sea, more worried about Cochrane himself than anything else. In ten minutes Busuk returned, following Cochrane; the latter threw off his topee and dropped into a chair.

"Whew—hot work down there!" He felt in his pocket and held out a key. "Gin and ginger-beer will go first-chop, eh? Busuk, bring the gin decanter and some ginger-beer."

The Malay took the key and went into the house. Cochrane reached for a cheroot from the open box and bit at it.

"What's up? Anything special?"

"Depends on the viewpoint," I responded slowly, and extended his letter. "Here's your precious document. This paper absolves your trickery, your chicanery, your theft. You've made yourself an authority to take from a thief and restore stolen property. Eh?"

He flushed a little. "Hard words, aren't they? Better to say that this letter is my moral justification for helping a widow to regain her own property."

"But—suppose you were wrong?"

He frowned, his gaze driving at me. "You've admitted I was right."

"I admitted the letter was genuine," I amended. "Do you know where Bonn is buried?"

"Malacca."

I nodded. "Last night I listened to your story about Bonn. Will you listen now to mine about Madame Bonn?"

"Of course," he said, more than a little puzzled by my words.

BUSUK appeared and moved the table between us. He set on it a tray, bearing some rice-cakes, two tall glasses of ginger-beer, the decanter of squareface with its little silver label hanging on the tinkling chain. I ordered him to close the door and window behind us.

The Malay gone, Cochrane laced the ginger-beer sparingly with gin. This universal tipple of the Far East was innocuous and pleasant. I took up my glass and sipped it, then resumed my cheroot.

"If my conjectures are right, the money from all this trading of yours is not banked, but is kept in cash by Mrs. Bonn. Is that so?"

"Yes," said Cochrane, frowning again.

"You don't know, perhaps, that when Bonn was here, Tanjan was his assistant."

"No!" Cochrane sat up stiffly. "Is that so?"

"It is. Now, you can confirm my statements later on, without trouble. When Bonn shot himself, Tanjan was sent to Singapore, applied for a job with the Inter-island, and managed to get sent here with you. Meantime, Madame Bonn had found that letter from Sparks, and kept it. She knew its value, but there was something she needed to do. So she took Bonn's body to Malacca, buried him, and did what was necessary."

"What was it?" demanded Cochrane swiftly. I shook my head.

"Not yet. Coming to it later on. You



"I'll take the revolver—quick!" said Cochrane. The kris in his hand pricked Busuk's shoulder.

came here with Tanjan, who probably prepared you on the way to receive the lady's story." I saw a shadow come into his eyes at this, and felt keenly sorry for the man, in view of what was coming.

"Let's pass briefly over what took place here," I resumed. "You were cleverly handled, and your sense of justice made you act as you did. Had Madame Bonn been playing a straight game, she would have banked the money as it came along; she did not. Money in banks can be reached by the law. You assumed full responsibility for what was done, having this letter from Sparks as protection and justification. You even planned to go to Singapore and face him with it. When I came along, this seemed no longer necessary to you."

He watched me, listening with a mystified air.

"That little point, however," I went on, having turned my chair so that the lady could not appear without my seeing her, "was of supreme importance to Madame Bonn. You'll remember the suggestion came from her at tiffin that you go to Singapore with me."

HE nodded. I tossed away my cheroot and took up my drink again.

"What happens? She goes to Bangkok, with tomorrow's shipment, and makes collection. With her goes Tanjan. I suppose he has been quite convinced of the justice of what's been done?"

"Yes," said Cochrane. "And he has high regard for me."

"You think he has," I said, and smiled. "With them, also, go the two house-boys. Why? So that every trail will be lost. Siam is a safe place if anyone fears the law. Meantime, what happens at Singapore, when we arrive there? We have a meeting with Sparks or with the attorneys for the Inter-island—and within half an hour you are under arrest."

Cochrane started. "Under arrest? But the letter—"

"Will not protect you. You'll be held responsible for all the looted stuff here. There will be no mercy shown; you know how they make examples of any agent who goes wrong! Your plea will not be accepted. It'll be said you tampered with the letter yourself and are trying to shift the blame on a widow. In any case, the woman will have vanished, and so will the Malays who might bear out your story."

Cochrane's face was livid. He stared at me with a deep anger-glimmer in his eyes.

"I don't get it," he said quietly. "You've said the letter was genuine—"

I held out my other letters from Sparks.

"Look at these. Sparks signs at some distance below the body of the letter. Now look at your own."

He opened up the three letters. Despite his pallor, he was very composed, and I noted that his fingers were steady.

"True," he said after a moment. "The signature here is closer to the body of the letter than in yours. Yet it seems genuine."

"It is genuine," I said, and he jerked up his head to look at me. "But Madame Bonn went to Malacca, remember! While there, she bought a typewriter, afterward returning it as not satisfactory. She picked the machine very carefully, getting the same make as that used in Sparks' office, with the same sized type. If you'll consider, she could not have found any typewriters closer to here than Malacca—it was her real reason for going there."

I finished off my drink. It had an odd acrid tang, very enjoyable.

"The first paragraph of your letter," I said, "was written by Sparks. The second paragraph, that in which he ordered his agent to break Bonn in every way, that on which hangs your whole moral justification—was written by Madame Bonn."

A low, incredulous exclamation broke from Cochrane, as he bent over the letters.

"How can you tell?"

"Easily. There's a very slight difference in the blackness of the writing, showing that two ribbons were used. Further, in the first and original paragraph, as in two other epistles from Sparks in my pocket this minute, every letter *'a'* is slightly out of alignment, just a trifle above the line. In this second paragraph, every *'a'* is perfectly aligned. The letter contains so many *a's* that the case is proved conclusively."

Cochrane regarded the letter for a long while, then lifted a ghastly face.

"You're right," he murmured hoarsely.

IT was frightful to look into his eyes. Many things lay there; the girl back in Glasgow, the wreck of his honor and repute, his duping at the hands of a woman, the prison sentence he was facing. Above all, the realization of how his presumably idealistic action, his chivalry, was actually nothing but theft and embezzlement.

This was the worst of all—the hurt to everything finest in him. For a moment I had the horrible feeling that Cochrane was breaking up here before my eyes; then he made a pitiful effort, and pulled himself together. A shaky laugh came to his lips.

"You're a good prober," he said. "The letter proves you're right. No doubt of it."

His face blurred before me, then came clear again; something made me feel ill.

"What's the matter?" he demanded.

"Nothing. The heat makes me feel queer, I suppose. Well, Cochrane, you've been badly duped. The game's still up to you to play, however."

He was silent, reflective, yet he had no choice. He must admit it all frankly. Color was returning to his face, poise to his eyes. He was himself again, had absorbed the blow, was thinking what to do.

"I've been a fool, yes," he said. "Hm! Sparks will be merciless, and rightly so. This last shipment must not go to Bangkok. The woman must stay here too, unless she gives up her money. I'll make what amends I can, resign, and take the consequences. I'm done for."

"No," I struck in—and wondered why the words seemed so thick on my tongue. "No, that letter shows how the woman cooked up a clever plot! Then, I can bear witness in your favor, and with the letter as proof, there's nothing to fear. I'll ask Sparks to leave you here in full charge, to make good—"

"Wont do," said Cochrane, and shook his head. "You're right, yes—but it wont do. I liked her pretty well, and while it's clear enough that she duped me, she's got to be held out of it all. You see, she's a woman."

"She's a criminal," I muttered.

He took a cheroot from the box, and frowned at me.

"You don't seem fit. Your eyes look queer."

"Smoking too much," I said, and wiped my forehead again.

Cochrane struck a vesta and held it to his cheroot. I shut my eyes, feeling dizzy, and began to be alarmed about myself. Could there be any fever here? Then, when I looked up, I saw him holding the vesta to the letter in his hand. It was half consumed.

"Stop it!" I cried, and reached forward.

He let the gray ash fall, and the look in his eyes was something to remember.

"She's a woman," he said, "and a widow."

"You're a fool!" I blurted.

He shrugged. "Not for the first time. If—hello! I say, you're white as a sheet!"

I tried to rise, but failed. Suddenly the truth flashed on me.

"Should have known—Lord! She heard me pumping Busuk — the liquor was drugged—"

A dizzy wave climbed up the sky and I went under it into darkness.

CHAPTER VI

COCHRANE was several ways from being a fool. When I keeled over in my chair, he wasted no time on me—concluded I was not dead. Madame Bonn was not going up against any murder charge except in case of extremity. So Cochrane reached out for his topee, clapped it on his head, and walked down the steps and across the compound on the beach path. He was pretty well knocked out, but the emergency pulled him together, and he had to act quickly if he was to act at all.

He had been made a fool of—this was quite clear. It was clear, too, why the lady had doped me; she wanted to keep me from telling Cochrane too much, not guessing that I had uncovered her entire game.

Anxiety grew upon Cochrane; in those few moments between house and beach, he lived an eternity, for increasingly he was wakening to the actuality of the situation. Not go up against a murder charge? Why, that woman and her gang would go up against any kind of charge, if they could only get away and reach Bangkok safely! Before any word could reach the outside world from Kuala Bat, they would be gone.

Cochrane wavered at thought of me—perhaps they had poisoned me after all! However, he rallied and went on. His only chance now lay in swift action. He was unarmed, alone, and against him were the woman and three Malays. He could not count on the natives here. If anything, they would take orders from Madame Bonn. He had been a fool—he and his folly of king's blood—they were all laughing at him!

He could see it now, could remember a dozen little things, words, looks, gestures. How complacently he had taken it all, thinking he had impressed them with his little secret! Yet all the while they had been inwardly mocking him, making a dupe of him, arranging to let him drop into prison while they went their way. Oddly enough, his chief resentment was against Tanjan—a double-dyed traitor there. He hardly blamed Madame Bonn for her plot, because after all her husband had lost heavily to the Inter-island. A desperate woman might be excused a good deal. Not Tanjan, however. That was different!

When he approached the beach, Cochrane was burning in his very soul with shame and fury. He felt in his pockets, found pencil and notebook, and wrote a brief chit. Then he beckoned the headman of the little village, who stood apart from the work at the godowns, and gave him the folded note.

"Take this chit," he said. "When the steamer comes tonight or tomorrow morning, put off quickly in a boat and give it to the captain. Keep the matter secret."

The Malay tucked the folded note into his waistband, and spat red on the sand.

"Aye, tuan," he said, wrinkling up his face and chewing his betel-paste. "She came last time, remember, in the night, at the hour when children sleep."

True, she had anchored last time about ten at night.

"No matter," said Cochrane. "Go quickly when you see her coming."

Tanjan approached. Getting out a cheroot, Cochrane was careful not to warn the man by any alertness of word or manner. The work was going forward merrily at the wharf, the last prau discharging its cargo into the filled sheds.

"Will Number One godown hold any more?" asked Cochrane appraisingly.

"There is room, *tuan-ku*," returned Tanjan.

"Come, then. I wish to speak with you when I have seen it."

Number One had side walls, while the other was only bare roof. Cochrane led the way into the shed. From the other came to them laughing voices, the cheery shouts of men at work, sharp orders. Out of the bright sunlight in the gloom of the shed, with piled boxes around, Cochrane turned to the Malay.

"How long were you with Tuan Bonn before you came here with me?" he asked reflectively. "Madame Bonn mentioned—"

Tanjan started. However, if Madame Bonn had seen fit to mention it—

"Two years, *tuan-ku*."

This was all the confirmation Cochrane desired. Already balanced for the blow, his fist lashed out like a mule's kick, and drove into the pit of Tanjan's stomach. The Malay gasped horribly, doubled up, and went down inert.

Cochrane bent over him, took his kris, flung it into a dark corner. Cord was ready to hand; he lashed the Malay wrist and ankle, searched him vainly for any other weapon, lifted him, and put him back on top of the boxes, out of sight. Then he departed.

GOING to the wharf, Cochrane finished the work there, signed up for the consignments, and left everything shipshape. He wondered why his own drink had not been drugged; but perhaps it had. He recalled now that he had scarcely tasted it.

Everything finished, and the praus on their way back to the mainland, Cochrane went slowly up to the bungalow. He was very sick at heart over the whole business, and he had reason for despondency. A sorry sort of fool, this man who called himself a king! No wonder they had laughed. His opinion of himself had suffered, and so had his ideals. He had liked Madame Bonn as a good comrade, a friend to trust, a fine and tender woman wrecked by the world—but now he saw her otherwise.

Upon reaching the veranda, he found it deserted, and passed on into the house. At the entrance to my room, Madame Bonn met him with a shake of her head, and pointed to my figure in bed.

"He was taken ill—we've put him to bed. He's asleep now."

Cochrane nodded mechanically.

"Yes. Shall we go outside? There's a bit of breeze."

"Let's do. Tea will be along right away," she returned.

"Right. I'll wash and join you."

Cochrane went to his own room. In the desk drawer he had a pistol. It had lain there untouched, unloaded, since his arrival. He opened the drawer, broke open a box of cartridges, looked for the pistol. It was gone.

After an instant, he closed the drawer again with a shrug. What matter!

Presently he came out on the veranda. Busuk was setting out the tea things, and Madame Bonn greeted him brightly, cheerfully, purringly. She asked about the shipments and said she had better take charge of the papers, since she would be going to Bangkok while Cochrane went to Singapore. Then there was the matter of his salary—she could refund that here and now from her cash-box, if he desired.

Cochrane assented wearily.

She went in, and came back to the veranda with a long, highly carved sandalwood box, a toy Cochrane had given her some months previously. She laid it aside while she poured the tea, and then flung him a merry question.

"You haven't decided to file claim to the throne of England?"

At any other time he would have laughed. Now the words hurt, for he saw derision beneath them. He shook his head, silently, and she reached across the table and touched his hand.

"Pardon! I did not mean to hurt you, my friend!" she said contritely. "Something is wrong with you—what is it?"

"Nothing," said Cochrane. "Headache, and the heat, I think."

Busuk was standing beside them. Silently, he put sugar in the tea-cups as they were filled, and then into Cochrane's cup a drop of orange-flower scent—a pleasant little habit to which Cochrane had fallen victim. Madame Bonn rose again.

"Wait—I'll get you an aspirin, and some quinine. We can't afford fever, you know."

She went into the house. Cochrane dismissed the Malay, and when he was gone, quietly exchanged the cups on the table. The sandalwood box lay to one side. He had intended to get it into his possession, and face the woman down at once—yet he found this very hard to do. So he put it off, and waited.

She returned quickly with the medicine case. He watched narrowly, but she made no false moves; laid out an aspirin and a quinine capsule. He thanked her and washed them down with a swallow of tea.

Madame Bonn opened the sandalwood box, drew out an envelope, and passed it to him. Opportunity hammered, but Cochrane said nothing; he would wait, put off the evil task.

"Two checks endorsed by me, and notes to make up the right amount," she said. Cochrane put the envelope into his pocket without examining the contents. She drank her tea, without noticing the perfumed taste, and poured more. For a little while they talked over plans for the future, spoke of France, of the girl waiting in Glasgow for Cochrane's return.

"Tanjan will do well in business," said



Cochrane came to his feet, a scarlet splash jetting across his white jacket. The revolver cracked. "King to king!" he said, as Tanjan spun around.

Madame Bonn. A queer pallor had come into her face. "You know, he was educated in a mission school, went hack to Islam, took a husiness course in Malacca, is thoroughly conversant with our ways and customs."

"I know," said Cochrane grimly. "And he helped take your hushand's hody to Malacca?"

"Yes." The steel-gray eyes wavered oddly. "He was here with Charles."

"You never mentioned it hefore."

"No? I suppose I took it for granted—"

SHE hroke off abruptly, and an expression of terror flashed into her face. Cochrane said nothing, hut regarded her with a stony imperturbahility. The little woman half rose, gripped the tahle-edge, then sank helplessly hack into her chair. Her eyes went to Cochrane, fastened upon his face, widened in comprehension of his ironic stare.

"You—what have you done!" she gasped out, and put a hand to her throat.

"Nothing," said Cochrane. "What's the matter?"

"I—I—*oh!*"

On the word, she opened her mouth as though to gasp for breath, then fell back limply in her chair, and her eyes closed.

"I thought so," said Cochrane, a certain mournful satisfaction in his voice. "So you had Busuk fix it, did you? As you had him fix the ginger-heer earlier this afternoon—"

She might have heard the words, for she stirred a little, moved feehly, and then once more went staggering down in her first posture. She looked very helpless, pathetically feminine, as she lay there like a child asleep, her pallid features bedewed hy a light sweat, one arm outflung on the tahle.

Cochrane did not move from his chair. He took a fresh cheroot from the box, lighted it, and considered the relaxed figure of the demure Madame Bonn, frowningly.

"So Busuk did it, eh?" he mused. "Clever devil, that Busuk! You figured on putting me out of the way now, so I wouldn't wake up until tomorrow, probably. Yet, I wonder why you didn't suspect anything when you tasted the orange-flower! You must have tasted it. Hm—that looks queer."

The more he considered it, the queerer it looked. He did not quite know what to make of the fact. That the woman should have heen doped with her own drink was beautiful poetic justice—hut it was not logical.

Worry came into Cochrane's eyes as he pondered. A small fortune lay in this sandalwood box heside him on the tahle. He knew Madame Bonn would have heen more than satisfied, had even wanted to

clear out last time, but he had persuaded her to wait and risk one more consignment. Lucky he had done so, now! Well, the woman must be taken care of—she must be got out of it at all costs. Cochrane knew he would have to stay and face the music, and intended nothing else.

MEANTIME, there were Busuk and Sahak to look after, somewhere inside the house, and the sooner done the better. The sandalwood box had best go into his wall-safe, thought Cochrane, and picked it up. He slipped off his pumps, rose, threw away the cheroot, and went into the bungalow with the box under his arm, and the key in the box. The money here must go to the Inter-island Company. So must the freight lying in the godowns.

Approaching the door of the room used as office, Cochrane came to a sudden halt. The door was not quite closed, and from the room came slight sounds, then low-pitched Malay voices. Busuk and Sahak were in there.

"By Allah and Allah!" said one. "We have found all there is, brother."

"So it seems," came the reply. "Where are the letters Tanjan Hajji said to keep? Give them here. Put all together."

Cochrane stared. Pillaging his office, eh? He heard the door of the safe go shut with a soft thud. Then Sahak spoke again.

"The woman, brother? What of her?"

"Put it in her curry tonight," said Busuk. "Thus Tanjan Hajji commanded. The white tuans will sleep, but she will remain asleep all tomorrow."

"We have not heard her cry out," said Sahak, his voice uneasy. "Surely she would scream when Tuan Cochrane fell asleep! I do not like it. He is not a bird to walk on a limed branch. Did you give him enough?"

"And plenty, by Allah!" said Busuk. "Here, fix this bundle—"

Cochrane stared at the door, incredulous anger stirring in him. These three Malay devils were all in concert! Madame Bonn had done nothing at all, had not used any drug—it was Busuk who had used the drug—and why? Simple enough. They mean to stage a robbery and get off on the Bangkok boat tomorrow! Thief was against thief, with a vengeance!

"Go and see what has happened," said Sahak. "Make sure of him, brother. Here, take his revolver—"

Cochrane drew back and waited.

CHAPTER VII

"I'LL take the revolver — quick!" said Cochrane, as the door opened.

With its opening, his right arm had moved forward. Taken from the wall, he held an old kris of Trengganu steel, made back in the days when the flamed blade of a kris and its sharp point were meant not for display but for business. As Busuk opened the door, the point of this kris pricked his skin just under his shoulder.

He held out the revolver and Cochrane took it. The brown man was absolutely paralyzed. Behind him, standing by Cochrane's desk, his elder brother was likewise unable to move; both Malays were stiff with terror at the sudden apparition of Cochrane. The latter gestured Busuk back into the room, followed him, and locked the door. The revolver in his hand was loaded. He laid the sandalwood box on his desk.

"Go and stand against the wall," he said to the two men. They obeyed, gray with fright.

Cochrane himself sat down at the desk, where lay the pile of money collected by the two looters. With it were two letters enclosed in a rotten rubber band. He took these up and inspected them. They were letters sent by Sparks to his private agent, the man who had come here and made a friend of Charles Bonn and betrayed the friendship. Cochrane read them, shook his head, replaced them in the envelopes. Then he looked up at the two men.

"Unfaithful to your salt!"

"Nay," stammered Sahak; "nay, tuan!"

"You planned to leave Madame Bonn here, to rob her and me, and flee."

"But we are not unfaithful, tuan, we are men of honor," said Busuk stoutly. "May fire be upon us, but not shame!"

Cochrane smiled thinly, bitterly. "How do you explain it, then?"

"The charge is true, tuan. Yet Allah knows Tuan Bonn paid us and dismissed us the day he killed himself. Tanjan told us to stay and we should be in his employ. From that day, then, we have taken the salt of Tanjan Hajji."

"Very well," said Cochrane sternly; "your lives are now in my hand."

"That is true, tuan," said Busuk steadily. "Who is man to avert his fate?"

"Your service with Tanjan Hajji is ended. His schemes are discovered and have failed. His life is in my hand, and

he is my captive. Turn, then, and serve me instead."

"In the name of Allah, tuan!" exclaimed the astonished brothers, almost together.

"It is an offer," said Cochrane. "Accept, and you are pardoned. Speak, elder brother!"

"I accept, tuan," said Sahak, his brown, sweating face glistening with relief. "Nay, we both accept, and praise you!"

"You may well," said Cochrane grimly, "for if you refuse my orders this night, I shall kill you. How long does the drug work you have given two people this day?"

"Twelve hours to a day of sleep, tuan," rejoined Busuk, "if the counter-drug be not given. The counter-drug kills the first in an hour's time. It leaves no ill effects."

Cochrane gestured toward the room where I was lying.

"Go and give the counter-drug to the white tuan in there. Let Madame Bonn sleep." He looked at Sahak and touched his revolver. "You both will remain here in the house. Get dinner ready for an hour hence. Go."

WITH a salaam, they obeyed. Cochrane went out to the veranda, lifted the figure of Madame Bonn, and carried her into her own room, where he left her on the bed. Then he came back to the office and sat at the desk.

With an enlarging glass, he carefully examined those two letters from Sparks, and laid them aside. He opened the sandalwood box, counted the money in it, and put it into his safe, box and all. Then, for a long while, he sat smoking, thinking, pondering. He did not know just what to make of one or two things. However, he was now certain as to his own position; the shipments would not go on the Bangkok coaster, and Madame Bonn would not go either. The village headman would take aboard that note—

"They'll clear out in a hurry," and Cochrane smiled grimly, "at finding there's bubonic ashore here! I can see 'em go."

It was nearly an hour afterward when I woke up, feeling rather muggy. Cochrane hauled me out of bed and nearly threw me under a shower he had installed, and gave me a needle-bath that fetched me to myself in no time.

"Get dressed," he said over his shoulder, from the door. "Then come along to dinner. No talk. I'll palaver later on."

His curt, decisive manner mystified me. I felt pretty much myself, except for a natural or unnatural drowsiness; but my head was clear as a bell. When I had dressed, I heard the chiming of a dinner gong, and found Cochrane waiting. We went to dinner together.

"Where's Madame Bonn?" I asked, seeing places for only two at the table.

"Asleep."

Cochrane said no more, and I disregarded his silence, for a furious hunger was upon me. Busuk, serving us, looked rather frightened. And in Cochrane I divined a new authority, an older, steadier air. He was sure of himself.

When we had finished, and coffee was before us, he called Busuk and Sahak. The two Malays came and stood at attention.

"Go to the beach," said Cochrane. "In godown number two you'll find Tanjan Hajji, bound. Loose him and bring him to me."

When they had gone, Cochrane squared away and told me what had taken place. He told it quietly, leaving out nothing, and drew no conclusions.

"Now," he finished, "I've made up my mind that all your theories were wrong We'll learn for certain when Tanjan comes."

"My theory was hinged on evidence," I said.

"Circumstantial evidence," he said gently, and let the words sink in.

PRESENTLY the thud of bare feet came from the gathering night. Before us appeared the three Malays, Tanjan in the center. He was immobile, accepting his lot with fatality. Cochrane gestured to the other two.

"Go."

They went out. Tanjan stood against the wall, impassive, waiting.

"You," said Cochrane to him, "were at Mâlacca with these two men and with Madame Bonn. There Madame Bonn bought a typewriter, later returning it. Why did she return it?"

"It was in her mind," said Tanjan coldly, "to make a slave of me, a typist. I refused the insult."

"Ah!" said Cochrane. "And from that day you planned to betray her."

"True, tuan," said Tanjan.

"You planned to betray me also, to rob her, to leave us all here drugged, and to get away yourself."

"True, tuan," Tanjan assented.

Cochrane paused, frowning slightly, and then asked a curious question.

"Why do you call me *tuan,* instead of *tuan-ku?*"

The stolidity of Tanjan's face was rent asunder. His brown features glinted with a vivid lightning-flash of sheer hatred.

"Give you king's title? What are you to me? A white king by birth—bah! What is that? I am of the royal line myself. My fathers were kings in the north before yours knew there was an Asia! The woman insulted me, would make a slave of me. You would make a slave of me. Bah! Allah alone knows all things. It is the will of God."

With this brief outburst, he relapsed again into stolid silence. Cochrane drew a deep breath and turned to me.

"There's the thing we didn't know! Now, here are the two letters I mentioned. They are both from Sparks. Read them carefully."

I TOOK them, examined them. Both were very similar to the burned letter—the incriminatory letter. Both were from Sparks to his agent, emanating from his private office. Both were signed by him, close to the body of the letter. Both had received additions from a second machine with the variety of type. These additions were private instructions from Sparks, and while they contained nothing very bad, held enough and to spare.

"She made these too?" I said. Cochrane uttered a laugh.

"Use your head! Sparks sent his agent certain instructions he did not want to go into the company's records—carbon copies are filed, you know. The letters were written. Later, Sparks or his confidential secretary added the private instructions, perhaps on a machine in his own office. You see? Your whole blasted theory is shattered."

And it was. It fell down like a house of cards. Sparks had initialed one of these additions in his own hand. I laid down the letters, saw my errors, went cold.

"You win," I said slowly. "Good Lord, what a fool I am! What a fool!"

"I win!" Triumph lighted Cochrane's face for an instant—more than triumph, a light of self-justification. "All I have done was exactly right. This woman is exactly what I thought her. Thank heaven I did not accuse her to her face on the strength of your imagination!"

I nodded. "And now what? The game is back in your hands to play."

"And I play it!" His fist came down on the arm of his chair. "This big final shipment goes to the Inter-island on the next company's boat. We go with it, all of us. I'll force an amnesty from Sparks—face him down with these two letters! He wont know that I burned the other one, unless you tell. Madame Bonn takes her money and goes home. I go to Glasgow. That's all! Are you with me or not?"

"Play your game," I said with a nod. "Play it like a man—"

"Like a king!" said Cochrane, with a sudden flash in his eye. "Like a king—"

Something moved. I, at least, had forgotten Tanjan standing there against the wall in stolid silence. Swifter than eye could follow, his hand had jerked down a heavy-bladed knife from the wall, and it glittered in the lamp-light. There was a thud.

"Like a king!" cried out Tanjan, mockingly. "Then I too play my game like a king!"

Cochrane came to his feet, a scarlet splash jetting across his white jacket. His hand came from his pocket, the revolver cracked out.

"King to king!" he said, and laughed.

Tanjan spun around and fell through the doorway, and was gone. I caught Cochrane as he staggered, and lowered him into his chair. Sharply, abruptly, he put a hand to the knife in his side, jerked it out, uttered a low cry. His head fell forward.

What a man he was!

HALF an hour later he opened his eyes. He was in bed, I was sitting beside him watching him. He remembered everything instantly.

"Well?" he said.

"It's all right," I told him. "You'll go to Singapore on the company's boat—alive."

"Like a king!" he said, and smiled as he went off to sleep.

I sat there for a long while, thinking it over. I was glad there was no royal blood in me! It's a dangerous possession.

And if you remember the annual report of the Inter-island for last year, you'll know that Cochrane played out his game against Sparks, and won it—like a king!

THE END.

REAL EXPERIENCES



Rabbit's Last Race

By
Howard R. Whitsell

An impressive story of the Great War—of an abject coward and a real hero.

HE had earned his sobriquet—undoubtedly fitting—in the early days of the war. It was bestowed by men who were themselves entirely contemptuous of danger. At the merest whisper of a stray bullet or the approaching whistle of a shell, "Rabbit"—his name was Montford Hewitt, though everyone had forgotten it—would give a very creditable impersonation of the creature after which he was named. You got one glimpse of a face convulsed into a hideous mask of terror, then Rabbit was gone, with one bunnylike dive, into the nearest hole—no matter of what description—and there he would remain, shuddering, until forcibly removed.

As a soldier Rabbit was a total loss. He couldn't hit "Hill Sixty," for he was afraid even of his own rifle. He was never given sentry duty, for very obvious reasons, and after he had bolted one night on ration fatigue, when Fritz lobbed over a few "Marias," and abandoned half of Company D's jam ration, which was later "lifted" by the "scroungers" of Company A, he was never again intrusted with a job that mattered.

There was just one thing that Rabbit could do, and for that alone he was tolerated—he could run! I have seen quite a few stars of the running game, Nurmi included, but I have never seen anything to equal the effortless grace and speed of Rabbit.

This lone accomplishment proved a veritable gold-mine to our Company. During the brief rests behind the lines he was matched against all comers, and backed with every *sou* that could be scraped up amongst officers and men. He was always willing to run—and he always won.

I could write a sizable volume on Rabbit's numerous victories. . . . . There was that "crack" from the "Buffs," an Oxford Blue who had never had a man show him the way until he met Rabbit. The Company gleefully cleaned up a pile on that scamper. Then there was that Frenchman from the Legion d'Afrique. . . . . But I must not stray, as this story is only concerned with his last and greatest race.

IN September, 1915, we were just about beginning to accept the war as a matter of course. Most of us had got past the stage when we would bang our chins against our knees whenever a shell came within a few yards, so when the order came to take over the Loos front it occasioned no more excitement than an order for kit inspection.

Now at that time Loos and its environs was not a place where one would go to spend a pleasant Sunday afternoon. I think it sufficient to say that if the super-heated hereafter, with which parsons often threaten the erring ones, is half as hot as that little bit of *La Belle France*, behold me henceforth as a pillar of moral rectitude!

On our right front Fosse 8 towered, its sinister bulk clearly silhouetted against the sky. It was merely a huge slag heap such as one may see in any coal-mining district, but it was a regular hornets' nest, impervious to shell-fire, concealing machine-guns galore, which peppered our trenches incessantly. Then directly facing us was the famous "Hohenzollern Redoubt"—a huge triangle, its base the German front line, with the apex pointing directly at us, a network of communicating trenches with hidden saps reaching out like great tentacles to within bombing range of our line—the whole works being well-nigh impregnably fortified by line after line of barbed wire.

The garrison of the redoubt were cheerful givers—they gave us all they had in the way of gas, lead, and bombs.

Rabbit had moved in with his platoon—which was also mine—and even those who despised him most for his evident cowardice, were moved to pity at his state of abject funk. Immediately on entering the line he had, as usual, dived for the nearest dugout—and there he cowered, trembling like a palsied old man, his face buried in his greatcoat and his hands tightly clamped over his ears, vainly trying to shut out the inferno of noises.

NOW the British soldier, above all else, takes a deep pride in his own particular little section of the army; consequently Rabbit's disgrace was kept a rigid secret within the limits of our own platoon. We regarded it a "skeleton in our cupboard" and it would have gone very hard indeed with anyone guilty of "blabbing" to outsiders. Of course it was freely discussed amongst ourselves, however, and many and various were the remedies suggested.

Bull Callaghan, who feared neither God, man nor the devil, was for "propping the lily-livered cuss on top of the parapet, to let Fritz blow the yellow streak outa him," but Rocky Andrews at once squashed that genial proposition.

"My Gawd!" he said; "I object! Just think if anything was to happen to his legs!"

"What about his bloomin' legs?" yelled Bull.

"You idjit," said Rocky witheringly, "didn't you ever hear about the fella that kilt the hen that laid the golden egg?"

"A fat lot *you* knows!" chimed in Lefty Mack; " 'twasn't a hen, 'twas a goose!" And a spirited verbal battle ensued.

MEANWHILE, it was very evident that there was something big about to come off in our sector. For days our heavies had been pounding the German positions, and the enemy had replied manfully, instilling a great degree of modesty into us "mud-larks" of the front line. The shrinking violet in its mossy dell could not make itself more unobtrusive than did we, as we crouched in the very bottom of the trench, absolutely indifferent to the oozy, slimy mud. We only made our presence known occasionally by swapping bombs with the ambitious "Willies" who were steadily sapping towards our line from the Hohenzollern.

Our casualties, considering all the hardware that was flying about, were slight; but the incessant pounding of the guns, the shriek of bursting shrapnel, the infernal *toc-toc-toc* of machine-guns and the vicious whine of their steel-jacketed pills combined in one frenzied medley of sound that ripped nerves to shreds. Indeed, the strain was being felt all along the line, and there were sullen mutterings of, "Why can't we go over and get done with it? Bloody targets, that's what we are!"

During this time I had only a few brief glimpses of Rabbit. To quote one wise-cracker: " 'E looks like a bloomin' corpse, with the bones took out, riding in the back seat of a flivver with two flat tires!" I pitied him. We all hate cowardice, but we have only great compassion for the sufferer afflicted with it.

At last came "The Day"—one date I shall never forget—September twenty-fifth, 1915.

We went over at dawn in the midst of a tornado of lead and iron, our objective the Hohenzollern Redoubt. On leaving the shelter of our trench we immediately became meat for the machine-guns on Fosse 8, and half our attacking force was out of commission before we reached the first line of German wire.

That wire! Twelve years have passed, but time has not dulled the horror of the few minutes' frenzied struggle through that web of death. To this day, the touch of a bramble in the woods is enough to send me into a panic.

Men died agonedingly, hanging there like grotesque bundles of old clothes, and even then the lead continued to smash into the bodies with a dull sickening *phut.* I saw Bull Callaghan, shot clean through many times, die on his feet, coughing blood and curses.

Away on the left our commanding officer was bellowing orders that nobody heeded. I noticed that although half his uniform had been left hanging on the wire, he still had his cane.

The rest is a blurred nightmare. I threw bombs wherever I saw gray uniforms, and kept on going, all the while conscious of some one keeping pace with me. It was not until I had dived to cover in a big shell-crater that I saw my companion. He was Rabbit! A panic-stricken Rabbit—still, he was there. I could have wished for a less depressing partner, but even Rabbit was better than no one.

WE settled down in our "funk-hole" and rested for about twenty minutes, during which I exhausted all my conversational artifice, but only succeeded in dragging monosyllables from him. Nor would he smoke, so at last I left him severely alone and crawled to the lip of the crater to reconnoiter.

Experience had taught me that curiosity in No-man's Land was not conducive to longevity, so it was with extreme caution that I took a peep over the top. What I saw gave me a bad shock, or rather, a series of shocks.

Our fellows had the redoubt—I could easily tell that, for I saw sandbags being heaved into position by invisible hands, to form a parapet; but here was the sinister joke:

The new parapet was facing us, and three hundred yards away; that meant that Rabbit and I were marooned between the Germans and our own line—a most unenviable position! Looking in the opposite direction, I got a second shock, for there I saw thousands of "Jerrys" massing behind Fosse 8.

AT that point my excitement overcame my caution, and I craned my neck in order to get a better look. The next thing I remember was Rabbit making herculean efforts to force a water-bottle down my throat. I had been neatly creased along the scalp.

Poor Rabbit was in a blue funk, and my news—told while he was anointing my dome with iodine—didn't reassure him any. I told him that "getting the breeze up" wouldn't improve our predicament; all we had to do was to keep "sitting pretty" until it was dark, when it would be a simple enough matter to "do a bunk" to our own line.

"But what about them Fritzies piling up behind the Fosse?" he said.

I looked wise and dismissed the question with an airy wave of my hand. "Never mind them," I said, "the artillery will give them hell in a minute."

Sixty minutes passed, however, and the predicted "hell" had not materialized, so I crawled up for another peep, this time accompanied by Rabbit.

The Jerrys were still there, only more so. It was quite apparent that they were about to launch a counterattack on the redoubt and they couldn't fail to take it. It would be swamped by sheer weight of numbers.

I was puzzled. Why, in Heaven's name, didn't our artillery let them have a barrage? Massed as they were, it would be an easy matter, surely, to wipe them off the map.

It was Rabbit who supplied the answer. "They can't be seen from our line," he said.

He was right. Fosse 8 obtruded its huge bulk between the concentrated Germans and the British observation posts. It was only owing to our advanced position between the lines that we were able to see them—and we were helpless. We had no means of communicating our discovery, and unless the artillery was warned the redoubt was doomed.

TRUE enough, only three hundred yards separated us from the line to which our news meant so much, but anyone crossing

that strip would be a target for the whole German army. There wasn't one chance in a million that anybody could negotiate the passage and live.

"Well," I said, turning to Rabbit, "it's curtains for the redoubt, and God-knows-what for us!"

He made no comment but slid back into the hole and started to divest himself of his equipment.

I watched him speculatively. Having extricated himself from his "harness," off came his tunic; next he started to unwind his puttees.

"What's the idea, going to have a sun-bath?" I asked, with what was meant to be withering sarcasm. He ignored my feeble attempt at wit and completed the removal of his puttees. Then he dropped his bomb.

"I am going over to warn the redoubt," he said calmly.

I COULDN'T have been more amazed. I thought of the shivering, cringing, whining travesty of a man whom I knew as Rabbit, and was convinced that he'd gone crazy. Something of my thoughts must have shown on my face, for he said: "I know I'm a coward—I always have been; but you must admit I can run."

"Don't be a darned fool," I remonstrated. "You wouldn't go ten yards before they riddled you!"

"Anyway, I'm going to try. Good-by," he replied; and before I could make a move to stay him he was over the top. His appearance was the signal for a hail of lead. What saved him I don't know. At ten yards he picked up that peerless, unbeatable stride, that inimitable action, of which he alone was capable.

Fifteen yards, and the bullets from the Fosse were plowing the ground beneath his flying feet. At twenty, his cap was whisked from his head, as if by an invisible hand, but he never faltered. Running as he had never run before, those wonderful legs functioning with machinelike precision, he had covered more than half the distance before I let my breath go, in a whistling gasp, through a painfully constricted throat.

THEN for the first time I began to hope. I had "rooted" like a maniac for Rabbit, when the issue at stake was the wherewithal for nights of conviviality, where officers "buddied" with buck privates, and even the aristocratic champagne and the plebeian "bread and cheese" were partners; but this was far different. I was stricken dumb with wonder at the miracle being enacted before my eyes. An abysmai coward lifting himself to sublime heights of heroism; a target for a thousand rifles, racing with death—and beating it! I couldn't tear my eyes from what I knew was the greatest race I had ever seen or ever would see.

Fifty yards to go; thirty. Then he went down in a heap. He was up in an instant and running again, but the snap was gone from his stride. I knew he had been hit.

Twenty yards. He stumbled again, but recovered. Fifteen! He staggered like a drunken man. Then with a *w-o-o-o-sh*, a "black Maria" landed and burst behind that tottering figure, throwing up a cloud of inky smoke which blotted it completely from my sight. I stared wide-eyed at the smoke, until it cleared. Nothing but a huge hole! Stunned and awed, I slid back into the crater.

How long I squatted there, my brain in a chaotic whirl, I have no idea. I was aroused from my lethargy by the terrific pandemonium of a new bombardment. I crept to the top. Heavens above, Rabbit had made it! The concentrated mass of German troops behind Fosse 8 were being decimated by a merciless hail of H. E. and shrapnel. In less than fifteen minutes there was not a gray uniform in sight, save those that would never move again.

WHEN under cover of darkness I rejoined my sadly depleted platoon, my first inquiry was for Rabbit. It would be gratifying to be able to record that he had come through, and was a candidate for the V. C., like some invulnerable movie hero; but alas, *this* was reality! I learned that although literally shot to pieces, he had managed to gasp out his information between gushes of life-blood—and had died surrounded by weeping men, who though they once had regarded him as beneath contempt, would now have exchanged their hopes of Heaven for a chance to shake his hand and ask his forgiveness.

So concludes the little story of Rabbit—the greatest runner, the most abject coward, the noblest hero—the most intricate puzzle I have ever seen. I have tried in vain to understand his make-up. Perhaps some of the ultra-smart disciples of Freud can explain him. I cannot.

By
Ed. Wolff

Prospecting in Mexico brought the narrator into a serious situation with the Yaquis.

Seeking Silver



AT Santa Rosalia, just over the border of Sonora, Vincente announced that he could guide us no farther. In voluble and superlative Spanish he assured us that Our Graces had been most amiable, most kindest, most finest in every conceivable respect. He would never forget the most many courtesies, the abundance of goodness, and he gave us the most complete thanks. But into the mountains beyond this point he could not venture. It was impossible.

"And why?"

"*Los Yaquis.*"

"But gosh, Vincente, those Indians are not bad unless you stir 'em up. Treat 'em right, and they're as nice a bunch as anybody else, I'll bet."

"*Pues si, señor.* Your Graces undoubtedly are supremely correct. It is not for an ignorant person like myself to pretend to know. For two weeks I have done my best, no? I have cooked, and tended horses, and made camp, and washed the clothes. But now I think that my wife is sick."

"Why, when we left she was looking fine!"

"Well, then, my father."

Dave said: "Aw, pay him off and let him go, if that's how he feels. He'd sneak out on us tonight, anyway."

So we up-saddled and made for the mountains. All that day we rode—that slow, steady trot that eats up miles, yet leaves both horse and rider without fatigue at the end of the day. Our ponies were mustangs, and we sat those cantled Mexican saddles as easily as we would a rocking-chair. Huge cottonwoods, clustered thick and interspersed with pines, crowded the narrow trail; we rode through tunnels of shade.

Every now and then as we topped a rise there spread before us majestic valleys waving with billowy soft beds of foliage, as if somebody had sprayed a dozen of those fleecy white clouds with liquid emerald and then rested them tenderly down on the valley floor. But the sides of the mountain as they rose swiftly to the sky across from us showed bare and raw. The strata lines were twisted and tortured. We were reaching the mineralized country.

NIGHT drops down on you fast in that latitude. The sun sets in broad glare of day; an unseen hand throws a blanket over it, the radiant sky turns suddenly black and the world is ink. Only far above, where the stars have popped into sight like flickering candle flames, is the darkness broken. It was high time for us to camp. But where? We had to find water.

"What's that over there on that knob?"

cried Dave. "Sure, it's tents. And men, Come on!" We spurred the horses, heading them to the left. But they had caught wind of the camp and needed no urging. Within ten minutes we rounded a clump of cedars as tall as the Flatiron building, and rode down on the gathering. Dave moaned:

"Durn the luck! Indians!"

THEY received us in stolid silence. Not a lounging male honored us with so much as a glance. The women, obedient and submissive, ostentatiously kept their backs toward us in spite of their manifold duties. Only the children, naked and unspoiled by custom, stared at us unflinchingly.

Dave held our horses. As I walked toward the largest group of men, I noted that they stood tall and straight. Not one pair of trousers in sight; every man wore simply a blanket. There was a moroseness about their expression, and a dignity that lifted them above the ordinary Indian of Coahuila. I greeted them in Spanish. No one even looked at me.

I had expected that. Your Indian makes no advances. He must be coaxed. Cigarettes would do the trick. So I took out a pack. Among Europeans you would have offered them a smoke first before taking one yourself. Not here. They'd suspect poison or *marihuana*. So I joined them, sitting on the ground at the edge of the circle with a careless: "How!"

After a few puffs and a careful appraisal I offered a cigarette to the most likely prospect, taking it out of the pack with my fingers for two reasons—firstly, it's sanitary; secondly, that's the usual procedure among Indians of Mexico. Pretending at first not to see it, he finally accepted with extreme dignity.

The others followed suit, and gravely we smoked in silence. It was not my turn to speak. At length one grunted a monosyllable to his neighbor, receiving no response. Then I asked permission to camp near by, and the privilege of watering our horses. No reply. I waited. Minutes afterwards a squaw passed with a bucket. Some one gave her an order. She relieved Dave of the horses. He came and sat beside me while she unsaddled and led them away.

The Indians were Yaquis, we learned, the most feared tribe in Mexico. Fierce and unrelenting fighters, even the Federal troops fear to attack them unless the odds are overwhelming.

It so happened that neither Dave nor I had ever been among these. Still, experience on the plains had taught us a great truth—an unmolested man is seldom dangerous on a full stomach. We plied them with canned goods, opening the tins, eating a part ostentatiously, pleading—as is the custom—in dumb show that they condescend to partake with us. Civilized pride is one thing; discretion among Yaquis is another. Truckling to the whims of a dirty savage when you are miles away from a friend is not delight, but it may be wisdom. We did our utmost to make ourselves agreeable.

In the morning we discovered that one of the bucks—apparently a pretty important somebody—was suffering from a raging toothache. A bit of oil of cloves on a wad of cotton soon fixed him up, and after that we belonged. Then Dave whispered to me, "Say, look at the buttons on that squaw's dress."

I couldn't believe it. Nobody could have.

However, it was worth the chance. Chaffering, dickering, partly in dumb show and partly in Spanish, we finally bought the filthy cotton garment for two cans of lambs' tongues and a cartridge belt. Then I pounded one of those buttons between my prospector's pick and a rock, seeking to work off a bit of the metal. It could hardly be iron, for where would these nomads learn to smelt? And yet the other idea was preposterous. Nevertheless, the button was encouragingly soft and malleable. Maybe—

A test-tube and a few drops of diluted nitric dissolved it. Another sample, blowpiped on charcoal, tucked itself into a globule and spit. Silver! Pure silver, hammered into disks and serving as buttons! One day in the mountains and already on the trail of a virgin silver deposit! Glory be! Now for the diplomacy.

DAVE, crafty as Nestor, counseled ostensible indifference, patience, ripening of acquaintance. Indifference, with uncountable ounces of silver almost within sight! Patience, with the lure of precious metal dangling daily before the fingers! If I could have thought of a way we wouldn't have waited; but I couldn't think of any. I couldn't think of anything but silver—threads and nodules and crystals

of it, simply waiting to be turned up with a pick!

And here forty lazy possessors of the secret lolled in the shade day after day, waiting for eternity to overtake them! Once I ardently wished it to arrive—for them—ahead of schedule and then I caught my breath and reversed the hope, panicky in the thought of never learning the location if they all met their doom at once.

Hammered native silver! They wore it on their saddles in four-ounce ornaments; they bent strips of it into clasps to hold their rawhide sandals; several had arrowheads pounded crudely out of the gleaming mineral; and one inventive genius attached a long tempting tongue of it to a discarded tomato-can of ours and used it for a dipper!

I couldn't wait any longer. "Dave," I urged, "find the village bum of this bunch and offer him anything—horses, guns, whatever he wants—if he'll show us the place."

"Yeah, fine chance. The weak brothers in this outfit are scared of the big bucks. Didn't you see—"

"Well, go after a young one. Tell him he can get enough blankets and horses to buy a wife."

"Yeah—and have him tell Barney!" (our name for the chief).

"Well, civilized or savage, there's always one man you can make listen to the siren song of wealth. Find out the richest man in the gang and talk turkey to him. You can always interest a capitalist. That's why he's a capitalist—because he's got sense."

"Haven't you ever given a thought to what might happen if this little scheme got tipped off? Do you want to argue it out with forty irritated Yaquis up here in the mountains?"

It was two days later that Dave strolled into the tent casually, as if about to take a nap out of sheer ennui. Then, stretching lazily across his cot, he picked up a magazine which we had worn down to the deckle edge and said, "I'm going to read to you. Act sort of tired and uninterested."

"You're going to what?"

"Shut up and listen." He pointed to an illustration and began to talk in a voice that was all explanation, apparently. "I've got a guy lined up. The scheme is for us to want to get to the railroad and offer to pay somebody to guide us. My man will do the rest. We are to start tomorrow morning."

"How far is it?"

"Half a day's ride."

"From here? Near water? Any roads? How deep down is—"

"That's right. Get all excited and tip it off."

Joshua isn't the only man who made the sun stand still. Somebody else did it that time again. I never knew a day to take so long. Every two or three hours I'd look at my watch and it would be five minutes later. After generations had been born, matured, become grandfathers and gone down to the grave in hoary age the night came at last. But not sleep. The Indians sat about the tiny fire and pow-wowed. Up in the mountains coyotes howled. Once in a while a panther would let out his quavering yammer. Then his son would do it, then his grandson. The stars burned themselves to ashes and fluttered softly out of the sky in flakes from æon-old weariness.

I tossed. The bed grew hot. I threw off the blanket and was chilled. I turned my pillow. No use trying to sleep on the right side; I tried the left. No use. Tried sleeping on my back, my stomach. No use. I could feel my hair turning gray. The modern Joshua had stopped the sun on the other side of the world for good.

When Dave woke me, it was nine o'clock. "Let's go," he said. The guide was ready. We trotted away, calm and casual—on the outside. Inside, I was fevered. No amount of water could take the dryness out of my throat. Over mountain paths we went, single file. There must have been scenery but we didn't see it. We were too busy noting markers for future locating of the trail. Noon came. And went. "Say, Dave, isn't it about time we were arriving?"

"Wait a little. I think this fellow's circling on us."

He was. In another fifteen minutes we were sure of it. He was leading us around to nowhere, killing time. Dave accused him of it, pointblank.

He made no denial. Pressed for an explanation he gave it willingly. The gods scourge those who reveal the site of precious metal. Yes, he had agreed to lead us to it, but he had changed his mind.

What would it cost to have him change it again? Not for anything in this world would he tell the dread secret. There had been a Yaqui once who flouted this idea. He took a white man with yellow hair to where one could dig out little hard white rocks like milk and they had gold in them. He received great wealth. But two years later the outraged deities wrought their vengeance. He died. That didn't prove anything? Well, it did to him. He was going back to camp.

I started to follow. Dave said, "Do you want to be there when he tells that gang what he took us out for?"

I sat on my pony, watching that Indian ride slowly up an incline, dip over the top, reappear after many minutes, reach a hill-top, look back and halt. Dave fired his rifle into the air three times.

Then he galloped over to the Yaqui. For five, maybe ten minutes they pow-wowed. The two turned and rode slowly back.

"All set," cried Dave.

THE Indian, morosely silent, cut straight into the heart of the circle he had been leading. Over a mountain, into a valley, over another crest—and then he stopped, gazing fixedly at the horizon. We waited. I looked at Dave. He was staring at new-dug earth perhaps a rod away. With a yell I dismounted, dropping the reins, and ran to investigate.

Quartz it was, bordering on limestone. And between ran a vein bearing native silver—threads, and nodules. Excitedly I hacked at the gangue with my prospector's pick. A few chunks came loose. Nitric acid and the blowpipe gave irrefutable testimony. We had found it. And rich! Two hundred dollars to the ton if it ran a cent!

We paid off the Indian. He had preserved the traditions, for he had not showed it to us—we had found it, you see. At once Dave and I set about erecting the monuments that the law demands. Then we rode into the hills and back to town for a surveyor. The guide branched off and left us, returning to his tribe.

That mineral deposit remains as it was, except for what the Yaquis may have dug out since. Twice we tried to work it, and twice we were cleaned out by marauding revolutionists. Things are getting more settled there now and we hope to try again before long.

Shroud Lines

By Leland F. Jamieson

An army aviator here records a remarkable experience during a parachute-test.

FLYING, I believe, is one of the most fascinating professions. And of all the varied and colorful phases of flying, parachute-testing is the most exciting. The termination of any jump is a thing to be regarded with serious consideration, and long experience is necessary before one can go aloft to make a jump with cool confidence that the ending will be a safe landing. If one slept near his parachute, I have no doubt that he would inspect it many times during the night before his first jump, when grave apprehensions produce insomnia.

That condition, however, is prevalent only before the first jump. Perhaps the second is preceded with some of those fears, but to a lesser degree. And after several jumps, under varied circumstances and different types of parachutes, one's faith grows to an extent that there is danger in that phase of flying too, of carelessness—acceptance of the idea that the 'chute will always function.

Lieutenant Paul Hanwalk was careless. Whether it was the result of his familiarity with parachute jumping, or whether it was a newly acquired state of mind, I don't know. He had always been oblivious to danger, had scoffed at the nervous warnings of his brother officers; but it was something new to me to see him negligent about ordinary precautions in his work.

I have known Hanwalk a good many years, and under vastly varying circumstances. I knew him during the war, when flying was much more hazardous than it is now. I knew him as a brother-officer



during the period of reorganization. And then I knew him when we were working together testing experimental parachutes.

Hanwalk is unique. I suppose he has worked, first and last, in nearly every one of the more dangerous professions. He has been injured many times, but by the intangible something which protects some mortals' lives, he has been able so far to cheat the grasping hand of death.

AT the time I was assigned to help in parachute-development work, Hanwalk had been at the job for several months. At that time he knew as much or more about the practical side of jumping than any other man in the Army. He started more or less as a helper in the research department, and before long he was given the exacting work of conducting all the live jumps which were made with experimental parachutes.

In my opinion that is a questionable honor. At least it is something which I would never envy a man; but soon after I came to work with Hanwalk I realized something of the glory in which he lived when testing parachutes. Of course he was constantly in the spotlight of publicity, and as time passed, it seemed to me that jumping with new and untried 'chutes became a mania to him. The dangerous part of this was that in his enthusiasm for his work he had developed a nonchalant, reckless attitude toward danger.

Soon after my arrival to the division a new parachute was sent down for test. The manufacturer was loud in his guarantees, and very sure that his article would be accepted by the Government if it was given a fair trial.

As was customary, we made several dummy tests. In these the 'chute was attached to the dummy of a man and thrown from an airplane. A cord about seven feet long operated the rip-cord when the dummy had fallen from the plane. After several days of this work it was decided to use the 'chute for a live jump.

I was very worried the morning of the jump when Hanwalk came out to the ship wearing only the parachute which was to be tested.

"Better take your regular 'chute along. That new one might not open," I admonished.

"This one's worked on all the tests," he replied, smiling lackadaisically. "This is a good 'chute. My other one weighs seventy-five pounds. That's too much weight to carry around."

I was to pilot the airplane for this test and Hanwalk got into the cockpit behind me and told me to go to eighteen thousand feet. He said he wanted that much altitude, so he could experiment with the 'chute on the way down.

After nearly an hour of climbing I reached the altitude he wanted.

He carelessly looked over his harness, climbed up on the fuselage and with a wave of his hand dived off into space. I immediately dived the ship, in order to be about on a level with him when the 'chute opened.

He usually let himself fall about a thousand feet before pulling the 'chute open; then after the big field of silk was lowering him easily to the ground, he mentally computed data by means of a little barometer he wore attached to a string around his neck.

I became vaguely worried when Hanwalk did not pull the 'chute open when he had fallen over a thousand feet. I felt

sure he knew what he was about, however, so I kicked rudder and eased the ship over closer to him. He was falling slowly, it seemed to me, because I was diving almost at the same speed. He was tumbling feet over head and rolling slowly, making no apparent effort to pull his rip-cord.

JUST as my ship slid over close enough that I could see his face plainly, I saw the long streamer of silk spill out of the pack. I relaxed my tensed muscles and waited for the 'chute to balloon open and break Hanwalk's fall, but instead of flaring open and snapping the falling man to an instant stop, the parachute remained extended upward in a narrow column, whipping violently in the wind and having no tendency to open.

Hanwalk was falling face downward now, so that he could not reach up to the tangled shroud-lines which attached to the harness on his body. I could see him struggling vainly to reach backward over his shoulder to grasp the harness, but it was beyond his reach.

Not until then did I realize that he was falling to his death, while I looked on, powerless to help him. Eighteen thousand feet is a little over three miles. And three miles is a very short distance by which to be separated from certain death. It is a matter of seconds!

It seemed to me that I must cry out—must do *something* to open Hanwalk's parachute, and at the same time I found myself thinking that such a tragedy as this would not happen—*could* not come to pass. I could see his face, very white and very tight-lipped, and I had some idea of the agony of his mind. Blood seemed to rush to my head and throb there like the strokes of an enormous pile-driver. I think I have never experienced fear—gaunt, suffocating, terrible—such as I lived through during that moment.

HANWALK had ceased trying to reach the risers of his harness, and was struggling frantically to twist his body so that he would be face up. For an eternity he writhed and rolled, while the speed of his fall constantly increased. Then suddenly he snapped over and reached for the shroud-lines where they attach to the harness. His position was very little better now than before, except that he could slap the lines back and forth in an effort to get air into the closed base of the 'chute. His arms worked like levers—back and forth, back and forth—jerking and tugging at the whipping, weaving pillar of silk. At each outward swing of his arms the parachute partially opened, then closed again.

Hanwalk had fallen three thousand feet when the parachute suddenly filled with air and bloomed like a giant white umbrella. I think my relief could have been no greater had I been falling in the 'chute harness myself. I pulled the ship out of the dive and looped, just from sheer joy.

But the strain of stopping his weight had been too much! When I looked back as I dived out of my loop, I saw that each panel of silk had ripped—a long gash which ran diagonally across each section of silk. Air passing through these vents had much the same action as steam through a turbine, and now the parachute was slowly revolving, like a great top. The rate of fall was again increasing—was already more than normal.

There was nothing to be done now! Hanwalk's fate rested with the gods of chance who had guarded him in the past. Unable to look on while he fell to death, I waved a hand in farewell and pulled away. But I could not leave. Some irresistible force made me fly back again, and I spiraled down around him as he settled, ever faster, toward the earth.

He struck the ground with awful force. His body seemed to bounce. Then it struck again and rolled and lay still. Mechanics had him in an ambulance on the way to a hospital when I finally quieted my nerves enough to land.

BUT—while he was in the hospital Hanwalk married, and a few weeks after his recovery he brought his wife out to the field! We were testing parachutes that morning, and there were some live jumps to be made. Hanwalk stood around nervously, like a horse at the barrier, excitedly interested in everything that had happened since his accident, and especially in the live jumps to be made that morning.

Mrs. Hanwalk told me, confidentially, that her husband had given up jumping. He had decided it was too dangerous—he must be careful now that he was married.

But before the morning was over, Hanwalk crawled into the harness of a 'chute that was to be tested and waved me to the pilot's seat of the airplane. He did the testing that morning. He is still doing it. He can't help it. It is in his blood.

There is no wild excitement in this story, but it is none the less a human document you will not soon forget.

By
Sidney R. Francis



The Crisis

ASK any man to name the experience that has left the most profound impression on his life and see if he does not hark back to the days before he had reached the age of man's estate. He is sure to drag out some apparently trivial incident of his childhood days.

It was that way in my case, and it happened back in New England fifty years ago. The actual experience consumed about thirty minutes of time, and while I am nothing much now but a doddering old grump, and a frightful, flying half-century of modern time has passed, the event stands out in my memory with a clearness and vividness as does nothing else of my entire existence.

I was about sixteen years of age. You know how you are at that period of your life. You just seem to know everything, and people don't realize how smart you are, especially grown people, even your own parents, who ought to appreciate and admire the scintillating wisdom of their offspring!

Well, I stood it as long as I could. My father, I felt, was only an uneducated, Maine clodhopper with no conception of the bigger things that stir the impulses of an ambitious youth. And besides, a New England farm was no place for a person of my genius and intelligence to spend his early years.

So I just had to get away from such deteriorating and hindering influences. Deliberately I had chosen my course. I would run away from home. I spent very little time in preparation, for I realized it was an awful thing to do, and I dared not give much time to contemplation of it.

It was midwinter. I selected a night with a full moon, as I expected to walk many miles and would need the light. With everything in readiness, I lay awake building my plans, till I heard the clock strike twelve. Everybody was asleep and all was still. Taking a small bundle of clothing, I slipped out the back door.

AS I gently closed the door and took a step, I heard a rustling noise on the porch near me and felt something brush against my leg. It sent a shudder all through me, but only for an instant, for I knew what it was.

It was Spike, my dog. I had not figured on him. Funny how a little thing like that at such a critical moment of your life will change the whole trend of your thoughts from the bigger things and shoot them off into some minor channel.

Spike was just a little cur dog of mixed

terrier breed. He was light brown in color with a white ring around his neck. He had short, bench legs and short, wiry hair.

For six or eight years Spike had been my playmate and companion. I never left the house to go anywhere that he was not at my heels. He was not much at hunting, for he was not built for speed, but it was many a great hunt through the fields and thickets we had had together.

ON this zero morning Spike pushed against me and jumped upon me with his fore paws. He poked his cold nose into the folds of my greatcoat, then he crawled in himself and snuggled against my legs. He was shivering from cold, and my knees were shaking and pounding together most violently, but not entirely from the cold.

I felt a curious, creepy sensation coming over me, something I had never experienced before. I can't explain it. If you never were a kid and owned a dog, just a little mongrel mutt without any class, that had been your playmate and pal from the time you first began to remember, you wont get this.

Somehow I got a feeling that I must get away—I must hurry. I pushed the dog down and stepped from the porch, out into the snow and the moonlight.

There was something about the still, white night that made it all seem like a dream, a strange, weird dream, like being off in another world that you never heard of before. The tall, stark trees, all dazzling white, glistening in the silvery moonlight, the stillness that you could almost feel, the vastness and whiteness, the grandeur and beauty of it all, a New England winter's night, that never is put into weak, human words; indeed, another world. Was I really moving out into another world?

HURRYING on, I pushed open the gate and turned around the corner of the house. Just then I heard a shrill whinny from the direction of the barn. It brought me to a sudden stop. That was Bob, something else I had not figured on. Bob was just one of the work horses of the farm. He did not belong to me, though I claimed him, the way farm boys have a habit of doing. Now his equine greeting sent another flood of memories rushing over me.

He was nearly as old as I was. I had ridden him when I was so small my legs spread out nearly straight across his broad back. As I grew larger I drove him and plowed with him; for some unknown reason he seemed to take a fancy to me. Of late years I did not even need a rein to guide him, and many a day I had plowed with him from dawn to dark without a sign of a rein, just guiding him occasionally by word of mouth.

He had a peculiar habit of greeting me, wherever he might be, in lot or pasture or harness, the minute he saw me. And he might be in the barn in a box-stall so close that even the sunlight could not enter, but just let me go out of the house and instantly would be heard his greeting. He could not possibly see me and I would not make a sound, but he knew the instant I came out. How did he know? Don't ask me. Just horse sense, I suppose.

I headed straight for the roadway but something seemed to draw me toward the barn. My feet just would take me there in spite of myself. Well, I might as well tell the old horse good-by, too, before I left, so I went on into the dark barn. When I entered he set up a scuffling and pawing at the stanchions, just as he always did, at the same time sending forth a sort of gurgling, throaty whinny, like a bass warble. I used to think he was trying to talk to me. I went into the stall and instantly his great head was pressed close against my breast. I stroked his nose and then put my arms about his head and held it close against me.

JUST then I felt something against my legs. It was Spike, who had followed me into the barn. He got up on his hind legs with his paws against me, and again crowded under my greatcoat. I could feel his nose poking around and his little cold body shivering against me. From time to time the horse would push and nudge me with his nose as if he wanted me to hold him closer.

How long I stood there with those two dumb friends close against me I never can tell. But something was happening to me. I don't mind telling you, gentlemen, I stood there and bawled like a baby. I don't mean I let out a howl or made a noise or anything like that—but the emotions that convulsed my frame were something I had never experienced before, nor have since. I have heard tell of people getting religion by going down the sawdust

trail with a big crowd looking on and ministers and good people talking to them. Of that I do not know. But I do know that in that dark barn on that cold winter's night I got something that has stayed with me till this day.

Just how this strange picture faded out has slipped my memory, but I remember moping back to the house with Spike at my heels. As I opened the door he looked up at me, wagging his stub of a tail. Why I did it I don't know, but I got down on my knees and grabbed the little fellow and hugged him to my breast so tight that it is a wonder I did not crush the life out of him. Then, when I released him, he crawled back into his bed box under an old piece of carpet and looked out at me with an expression in his funny little green eyes that I shall never forget.

YOU modern people say these dumb creatures have no mind. They don't know anything, cannot think, just dumbbells. But there are a few of us old fossils still left who know better. We know that they have a keen insight into our very souls. We know that they know when we are in trouble and need help, the kind of help that must come from away off out yonder somewhere, and they know, thank God, how to bring us such help when we need it.

Modern civilization has built the gasoline wagon, regular man-killing machines, that have crowded the faithful horses from the highways. Every day in every large city there is a truck-load of dead "mutts," —each one some little kid's faithful pal—killed by these slaughter machines, soulless monsters, and taken to the city dump. But civilization must move on. . . . .

I have heard that story writers bring you up to a trick climax, or something, and then end the story, leaving you gasping. But real stories do not end that way, if you are to get the meat of the nut.

I have got to tell you what followed that eventful night. It is as clear to me as yesterday, and I live over the old scenes every day, even now. Outside of myself no living creature ever knew of that night's experience, except Spike and Bob, and they never told.

From that time on things certainly looked different on the old farm. My father and mother seemed to have a halo about them, and the troublesome, teasing brothers and sisters were the finest bunch of kids you ever saw. Years passed on, happy years, the happiest I ever knew. All worked together to improve the farm. We built a new house and all kinds of improvements in keeping with the times. Every now and then my father would buy more land. The place grew in size and prosperity and we were indeed a happy family.

It seemed I hardly ever thought of the time when I should reach my majority. When I did it was with more of displeasure than of joy. At least ten years passed and I was still just a boy on the farm.

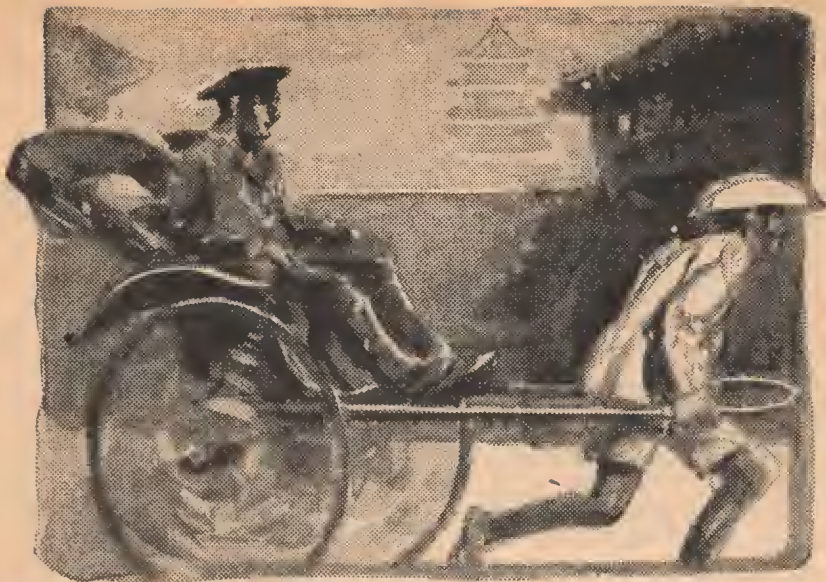
BUT things could not go on this way forever. It isn't nature. Then, there was Nellie—a neighbor girl, who had grown up with us. She was more of a chum to me than any boy friend I ever had. Well, you have already guessed it: we decided to get married. There was not any excitement, no romance, no soul-stirring love affair, like the fool stuff you read nowadays in the magazines—just things worked out sort of natural-like. Nothing more simple.

When I thought of telling Father about it I shivered and shook like a frightened hare. Strange, wasn't it? So one day I cornered him in the barn to spring the big surprise on him. He listened to me with a peculiar little grin. I could see his keen gray eyes were moist.

Then he replied:

"Yes, my boy, that is a great and fine thing to do. We have known all the time you would. Now, maybe I have a surprise for you. You remember that last eighty we bought, over across the hill? Well, the deed was made to you and it is on record down at the courthouse. And in the bank is a savings account in your name that Mother and I have been building for the past few years. That is for the house and improvements. You take Nellie and go down to the lumber yards and select a house plan. Pick a good one, for there is money enough to pay for it. That, my boy, is all yours. You have worked and earned it. But it does not begin to pay you for the splendid son you have been to us. Nothing can ever do that. May God bless you."

Just a few years ago we laid him to rest, at nearly ninety years of age. He was the greatest counselor and friend a boy ever had. If there were more like him in the world, it is a different world we would have today.



The Stowaway

By **Charles K. McDermand**

Wherein a sailor left on the beach in Japan stows away on a home-bound ship and runs into big trouble.

HAVE you ever been "on the beach" in a foreign land? Most likely not, for which you are lucky. You have escaped the hunger, the heat or cold, the utter wretchedness that comes from being penniless a thousand miles from home.

I was a fireman on the *President Jefferson* of the Admiral Oriental Line. The season was bad. Japan was a land of wet snow and winds that would chill an Eskimo. We made the round trip and touched at Yokohama as the last port of call. In ten days we would be home.

The desire for a sight of the capital city lured me to Tokio. We were due to sail that afternoon. Ordinarily the trip could have been made in plenty of time, but wet snow caused the train to merely crawl. My rickshaw reached the dock just as the *Jefferson* vanished from the harbor. There I stood with a lost feeling in the pit of my stomach. In an inner pocket of my very cheap and very wet suit, I had three yen—one dollar and a half. Beached and broke!

The thought of the American consul was a ray of hope. But that very estimable gentleman dashed it with these words:

"You want me to put you up, do you? Well, you found enough whisky to stay here in; now swim away in it. Get out."

Why argue a hopeless cause? I "got out."

My three yen was room-rent for a week. A fireman off a British tramp steamer traded a pair of dungarees, a jumper and five yen for my suit. That five yen bought food, such as it was, for a week.

After that the only food to be had was picked up or begged. I ate Jap rice and fish. Night found me asleep in all manner of places. Wet snow fell most of the time. A dry spot under the dock was luck.

Then the *President Jackson* came in. She was a sister ship of the *Jefferson* and like her in every particular. With her came an idea. Why not stow away on her for home?

She docked, and as soon as the sea-door was open, I was through and into the black gang's mess-room. The boys let me fill up to the neck. After the meal I tried to ex-

plore a bit, but there were officers everywhere. Finally Joe Sweeney, the first assistant engineer, ran me out and said emphatically not to come back again. But I sneaked down to the dock after dark.

Questions ran through my head. Fruitless, crazy plans they were. How to get aboard and where to hide if I did? The sea-door was now closed, and the gangplank guarded by a quartermaster. Just to get aboard somehow! Surely there was a hiding-place.

About three in the morning a chance came. Two of the black gang, drunk and reeling, came from town. One was almost out on his feet. They were dressed, like myself, in dungarees and jumper. The quartermaster on duty at the plank was in the lee of the crew's hospital, out of the chill beat of the wind. Stepping out, I put an arm about a drunk and helped him aboard.

My heaven-born inspiration worked. The quartermaster went through our clothes and attached a bottle of whisky. I don't blame him, it was a cold night. Then, imagining that all three were crew, he allowed me to pass. Glorious luck at last! Once in the companionway, I deserted my unsuspecting friends and dived for the messroom.

No one was about. The mess-boy had put out the night lunch. From the fo'castle came the only sound, the snores of weary men. I ate hurriedly and drank three cups of hot coffee from the urn. It was three-thirty; shortly the watch would change. I might be seen any moment.

MY plan was to get into one of the airlock bilges and soak there until we were at sea. The starboard airlock of the after-fire-room was closest to the messroom. An air-locker is an airtight shaft descending from the deck at waterline to the fire-room. At the bottom it is perhaps seven feet wide by ten long. In the center is the stair. Sliding down the hand-rails, I found a coil of loose steam-hose on the deck. Under it, luckily for me, was a loose plate. Pulling it up, I shuddered at the prospect below.

The bilges of a vessel are the space, perhaps three feet deep, between the fire-room and the watertanks below. Usually they are a half to two-thirds full of salt water and oil drippings and other slops. The odor arising tells the story. My intention was to sink in there and remain.

The water was warm. That was its only good quality. A gunnysack lay in one corner. Stuffed into a small manhole piercing the bulkhead, it would do for a pillow of sorts.

Propping up the plate and piling some steam-hose on it, I rolled into the reeking water. It engulfed me, oozed next to my skin. Hot blackness became my universe. Little slivers of light cutting down from the cracks above only intensified the jet. Lord, the slimy touch and utter reek of it! Thinking of *Jean Valjean* wandering through the sewers of Paris, I envied him.

A moment after my entry the relief slid down. One of them remarked that the *Jackson* sailed at eight. It was now four. The bilge must be my home until at least four hours from port. By that time the last link to Japan, the pilot, would be left behind. Time could be told by the changing of the watches.

The dragging hours became the demons of hell. The viscid, reeking water in my prison ebbed and flowed with the working of the bilge pumps. I grew sick from the stench. The deck and walls were covered with inches of thick crude oil. The whole place seemed alive and crawling.

The eight to twelve watch came on. Soon the vessel rolled a bit. We were off for God's country at last! The shake-down of the ship for stowaways would now start. Presently the locker door opened and the unmistakable voice of an officer spoke. He said: "Johnny, pull up that plate and take a squint at the bilge."

I had never imagined that they would search the bilge. The jig was up! There was just one chance to beat the game. Snatching the sack from the manhole, I sank in the farther corner. The sack lay over my face, yet appeared to float on the water.

Steam-hose was shifted and the plate clanged as the man heaved. A flash beam was turned onto my oily bath. A breath-taking moment, and then the voice: "Johnny, heave that sack out of there before the watch is up."

"Yes sir," said Johnny, as the plate clanged down.

A dirty figure snatched a sack from over its face, and with the first breath uttered a prayer of thanksgiving. . . . .

On crept the centuries. No use wondering when the fireman would come for his sack. The watches changed again. One of the men picked up coils of loose hose

from underfoot and pitched it over my loose plate.

The pitching and rolling became more pronounced. The bilge sloshed back and forth. We were in the open sea and exposed to the buffeting of the Pacific. Now all was safe. With a groan of relief, I heaved up from my reeking seat and braced a shoulder to the plate. It bulged, but that was all. That extra coil of hose was too much. Another desperate attempt, only to slip headlong in the slime. No use. The only thing to do was wait for the next watch and then yell.

Finally down came the men. I must have been pretty well gone, for no sound roused me until the roar of the fire-room flooded in for an instant. I yelled, but the locker only clanged in answer. One chance more; the relieved firemen going off watch. I prayed that they might not go out through the engine-room for a drink of ice water. If that happened, the man after his sack would find a dead body with it.

Some prayers are answered. One fireman went for a drink; the other stepped into the locker. I yelled as loud as a man in despair can yell.

His feet stopped, then started on. Every bit of energy in me went into another scream. He spoke, apparently to himself.

"What the hell's that?"

Another cry from the bilge under his feet.

With an, "I'll be damned," he yanked steam-hose away, pulled up the plate and peered down at my face.

"A nigger stowaway! What'cha think o' that? Here!" And he grabbed an arm and hauled the supposed negro onto the deck. Gasping there, I must have looked like a fish from an oil-bath.

He opened the locker, and I staggered into the fire-room. The watch came running up, asked questions, and helped wipe off sixteen hours of slime with bunches of rags. One of them remarked, "Lord help you, kid, when Joe Sweeney sees you!"

My discoverer led the way up to the mess-room. The others fell to—stripped, bathed and fed the "discovery." Some of them donated old clothes. Finally, after a thousand questions had been answered, a vacant bunk was mine. Sleep came with the peaceful thought that, terrible as Joe Sweeney might be, Seattle and home were not far away.

The terrible Sweeney, with a rough hand and a rougher voice, broke the peace. I have conveniently forgotten what he said. He was a throwback to the time of bucko mates. With kicks and abuse he strove to make one long for the beach again.

A stowaway was heaven-sent to those engineers. There was an unlimited amount of work to be done that the Chinese port help had been too weak or proud to do. The septic tank was cleaned that and every other day. I blew tubes, packed steam-valves, painted boilers, dived the bilges, cleaned suction-pumps. By way of rest I shined brass that the Filipino wipers found too hot to touch. It was pure, unadulterated hell—but we were approaching home at twenty miles an hour!

TEN days across the Pacific, and one momentous morning we started up Puget Sound. Regardless of the winter rain, the stowaway stood and looked, looked at the clean, green homeland. That's one result of travel. If it does nothing else, it makes a fellow appreciate home.

At Seattle I shook a futile fist at Sweeney, ran ashore, and with a borrowed nickel caught the trolley for home. A final look at the *Jackson* and I swore that my travels were a thing of the past. To this day I've never been back to Japan or worked on a boat. But if this history is printed, I'm sure going to send a marked copy to Joe Sweeney.

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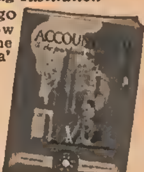
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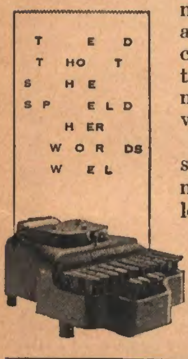
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